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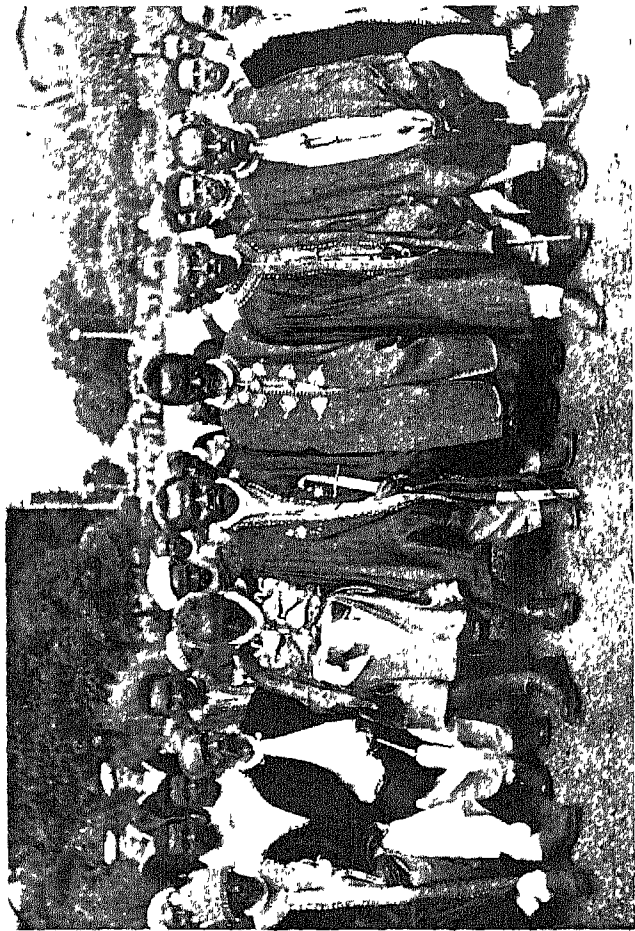
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*A Short History of*  
E R I T R E A





*Chiefs of the Eritrean Plateau at an Investiture held at the Palace, Asmara, 1944*

*A Short History of*  
E R I T R E A

BY

STEPHEN H. LONGRIGG

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR OF ERITREA, 1942-4

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## PREFACE

It was my hope, in undertaking this history, that by its account of the past and present state of Eritrea it might not merely interest the general reader, but also assist those to whom would fall the making of decisions regarding the country's future. This second end, however, cannot be attained with the completeness one would desire by a work of this brevity, which alone war-time conditions permit. On the historical side, in particular, it has been so far necessary to summarize, to omit, to generalize, to move forward with quick and barely satisfying glances in place of slow meticulous scrutiny, that almost every episode appears to its narrator to be inadequately treated, the evidence on almost every issue too summarily presented.

Nevertheless, I believe that the course of Eritrean history—its past relations to its neighbours as well as its internal affairs—has been recorded in substantial accordance with the evidence, even though this cannot be set forth in full. The sources from which such evidence is derived are described in an Appendix.

Besides the opportunity to consult these sources, due to the courtesy of Chatham House, the London Library, the Government Library of Asmara, and Italian residents in that city, I have had the enormous advantage of myself living in and governing the territory concerned for nearly three years. This has made possible, I hope, the acquisition of a first-hand knowledge of Eritrean conditions and problems, which could perhaps not be obtained otherwise.

Particular mention should be made of my good fortune in having, among members of my own staff, officers admirably qualified both to study native life and history, and to record their results. Among many studies, by perusal of which my own knowledge has been greatly increased, I should mention with special respect those from the pens of Major S. F. Nadel, of Major K. Trevaskis, of Major B. W. Lee, of Major J. A. E. Morley, and of Captain J. D. Duncanson. But to these names

could well be added a score of others, they would include many of those administrative and departmental officers whose work in Eritrea has, in spite of many war-time difficulties, reached so high a standard. Without the secretarial help of my wife the present history could not have been compiled.

Something is said, in early pages of this history, of the territory's varied claims to interest. Rich or great, Eritrea will never become; it may, indeed, disappear as a political unit completely from the map. But few who have lived and worked there will view it otherwise than with sympathy, or fail to wish its peoples well.

I have been unable to adhere to any rigid rules of transliteration from the Tigrinya or Amharic languages, and can only hope for the forgiveness of purists. Some forms, such as Dejjach for Dadj 'Azmatch, are merely popular. In the transliteration of Arabic words I have adopted the normal rules, except in the many cases where it seemed preferable to retain a more familiar form—for example, El Obeid for Al 'Ubaid, Mecca for Makkah. In the interest of the general reader, the use of Tigrinya, Italian or other foreign words has been generally avoided, even when these are commonly used by English-speakers in the territory itself. I have, merely for variety, translated Negus Negast sometimes as King of Kings, sometimes as Emperor. The name Abyssinia has been avoided in favour of Ethiopia, which is invariably used by and among Ethiopians themselves.

## CONTENTS

I. THE TERRITORY . . . . .	1
II. ORIGINS AND EARLIEST AGES . . . . .	10
III. FOUR CENTURIES OF ETHIOPIA . . . . .	18
IV. ERITREA, FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES . . . . .	27
V. THE STRUGGLES WITH ISLAM . . . . .	44
VI. EVOLUTION OF ERITREAN SOCIETY . . . . .	55
VII. A CENTURY OF THE TIGRAI . . . . .	73
VIII. THE RESTORED MONARCHY . . . . .	91
IX. EGYPTIANS AND ITALIANS . . . . .	100
X. ADUA . . . . .	121
XI. THE ITALIAN ADMINISTRATION . . . . .	132
XII. BRITISH OCCUPATION . . . . .	143
XIII THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE . . . . .	154

## APPENDIXES

A. Italian and British Administrative Divisions and Districts	176
B Table of Bani Amr Constituent Tribes . . . . .	177
C. Table of Population, Language, and Religion Statistics . . . . .	178
D. Sources . . . . .	179
INDEX . . . . .	182

## LIST OF PLATES

Chiefs of the Eritrean Plateau at an Investiture held at the Palace, Asmara, 1944 . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
The Eritrean Police . a Guard of Honour at Adi Caieh, October 1944 . . . . .	<i>To face p 48</i>
Opening of a new village school at Merrara: notables and villagers . . . . .	<i>To face p 48</i>
Asmara: part of the Corso Italia, formerly known as Viale Mussolini . . . . .	<i>To face p. 96</i>
Asmara: part of the Eritrean market . . . . .	<i>To face p 96</i>
A view of the Massawa-Asmara Railway, looking to- wards the Hamasien Plateau . . . . .	<i>To face p 128</i>

## LIST OF MAPS

Topographical features of Eritrea and Northern Ethiopia . . . . .	6
The Tribes of Eritrea . . . . .	30
The Distribution of Languages in Eritrea and Northern Ethiopia . . . . .	39
Eritrea . . . . .	<i>at end</i>

# I

## THE TERRITORY

### 1. *Place in the World*

THE purpose of this book is to give an account, mainly historical, of the territory which since the last days of the nineteenth century has been called Eritrea.

Its history in antiquity and during the Dark and Middle Age will be dismissed in a few summary pages, to make possible a slightly fuller treatment of the later centuries in which the territory assumed its present character. Nor will the attempt be made to deal with other aspects of Eritrean life which, however interesting, are without direct bearing on its history or present politics: that is, details of daily household life, ceremonies of marriage and birth, folk-lore and legend, spoken dialect and religious doctrine, custom and law. For none of these can place be found. It is intended rather to provide, on an historical basis, material for answers to the questions sure to arise (and indeed already arising) as to the disposal or future treatment of the territory on lines consistent with its history and its geography and its political and economic realities.

Eritrea—so small a corner of the map of Africa—has an area of some 45,000 square miles. Its form is that of a triangle whose base and height are each three hundred miles in length, while from the eastern end of its base-line drops a long narrow corridor of Red Sea coast. Its position among the nations is, in many senses, intermediate. It belongs neither to north nor to central Africa, nor typically to east. It is not of the Nile Valley, nor mainly of the Red Sea. Its country-side is partly of Ethiopian type, partly Sudan—and the same is true of its inhabitants. It has had its place in the policies of Turkey and of Egypt, of Ethiopia and of Italy. Its neighbours to-day are Ethiopia on the south, the Red Sea on the east, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan to the north and west.



The international or strategic interest of the territory must depend upon its position from the viewpoint of land, sea, and air. It is by land joined to the Sudan by a broad open border of steppe and hill tract, unbroken either in its geography or its human species by any line but a recent and political. At the same time the territory affords, by modern roads and railways, an easy corridor for traffic from Nile to Red Sea. The Ethiopian land frontier is established by river-beds, but these—dry save for a few days in the year—form no obstacle in the continuity of the terrain, and as a boundary follow no reasoned plan. In geography and the conditioning of human life, southern Eritrea is part of the great Ethiopian massif. It opens many and easy entrances to the Tigray and beyond, and holds the only coast-line by which northern Ethiopia can be approached. Eritrea in fact—or a part of it—must always be a factor of prime importance in any 'Ethiopian Question'.

On the great highway of the Red Sea, Assab has an easily improvable harbour immediately inside the Straits, and a modern road joins it to the hinterland. Massawa, its natural islands now linked by man to form the finest of Red Sea harbours, offers to the fleets of war or commerce advantages which they can best assess. It has easy access to healthy highlands inland. Here, and anywhere in the coastal belt, landing-grounds can easily be improved, or already exist: but the air-ports of the Eritrean highlands—at Gura and at Asmara—should by their climate and amenities be of greater interest for future air-routes. The highland conditions, indeed, of beauty and splendid climate and the setting of modern life which the last half-century has produced, are among the territory's most practical claims to the interest of the modern world.

## 2. *Claims to interest*

Such claims, however, are not confined to natural beauty or modern development, nor to the plans of strategists.

To the student of African races Eritrea offers a mosaic of peoples, whose past history can with fair confidence be traced,

and whose present diversity of cultures, languages, and economic habit is instructive. Not differing essentially from neighbouring peoples in Ethiopia and the Sudan, conditions have permitted them to be more closely studied. A surprising feature is the inclusion of types so various in a single, and a small, political unit.

Indeed Eritrea possesses none of the qualities of geographical or cultural singleness which should entitle it to be a unit of territory or of government; nor, since antiquity until its consolidation as an Italian colony, had its various peoples ever obeyed a single rule. That it now, all undeservingly, so exists is the unplanned result of a seizure in the late nineteenth century of the African territory readiest to hand, by an Italy newly united and competitive: a territory whose boundaries were fixed, at points to be condemned by all racial and economic criteria, by the fortunes of war and diplomacy in the years following. Had Italians never landed at Massawa, Eritrea would to-day be partly, as always before, the ill-governed or non-governed northernmost province of Ethiopia, partly a pleasant eastern extension of Kassa province of the Sudan, with the port of Massawa perhaps in Egyptian or Anglo-Egyptian possession. And if the battle of Adua had not been lost, or had been quickly avenged, Eritrea would to-day include far larger and homogeneous areas of northern Ethiopia.

Apart from the evolution of its own peoples, the territory has played a part in history. It was a central province of the Kings of Axum, and was ruled later by shepherd-kings from the north. It witnessed from its harbours the struggle for Red Sea power between the navies of sixteenth-century Europe, and protected itself against the Turks. It shared the fortunes of the Ethiopian State at crises of its history. When that State disintegrated, areas of it formed integrally part of the great sub-kingdom of the Tigray. It witnessed—and indeed provided a landing-place and communications for—the strange episode of Napier's expedition, when, after age-long obscurity, Eritrean names and circumstances were the talk of Europe. It was an object of aggressive

ambition of the Egyptian rulers, and was later raided by the Dervish hordes. It was the scene of the first Italian occupation of African soil and saw, before and after Adua, their difficult establishment and fifty years of pre-Fascist and then Fascist government. The campaign of Keren delivered it to British arms, and to a British war-time administration.

The territory, for reasons suggested, must always attract from the world an interest disproportionate to its size and population. In particular its fortunes can never be indifferent to those nations of Europe which have most striven there—Portuguese, Italians, British; nor to those whose interest was of lesser or briefer moment—the French and the Egyptians, and (through her victorious troops) India. And the brief phase of American war industry in Eritrea, following the British occupation, brought, for the first time, the New World to this remote corner of the Old.

### 3. *Land Surface*

The land surface of the territory is composed of four main types of country, with marked—and indeed surprising—differences between them. We shall describe in turn the south-central core of the plateau highland; the Red Sea coastal plain; the broken hill country forming the north and mid-west of the main triangle; and lastly the broad plains of its western face.

The plateau of the central south (to be known simply as the highlands) is the smallest and most favoured of these regions. It is sharply differentiated from the other zones by the abrupt and impressive escarpment by which it breaks down eastward to the Red Sea, and by its less sudden descents to the north and west. To the south it is continued unbroken in the Tigray highlands of Ethiopia. It forms, in fact, a second rough triangle within the first, its base a sector (east of the centre) of the base of the main triangle, its apex a point some forty miles north of Asmara, and its east side following the line of the great escarpment. Varying in height by stages and broken by irregular mountain masses, with deep ravines and rocky slopes, the highlands are watered by the Little Rains of February and March

(giving some two to five inches a year) and the main rains of midsummer, which deposit perhaps sixteen inches in a bad year and twenty-four in a good. They are drained by innumerable rocky channels, dry for nine-tenths of the year, which unite to form the Setit (known higher up as the Takazzé), the Mareb (Gash), Anseba, Barka, and a score of lesser 'rivers'. Lake Delia and the group of other small lakes, near and north of Asmara, are all artificial: there are no permanent streams or sources of water-power. The highland climate is—with the atmospheric rarity proper to an elevation of seven thousand to eight thousand feet—excellent throughout the year. There is little dust, constant sunshine, a healthy disease-free atmosphere, moderate winds, no frost save on mountain tops, while the rains appear in brief showers punctually to the day and hour. The seasonal change of temperature is slight.

In spite of clear air and wide mountain views and the broad expanses of grain crops in the autumn, the highlands fail of the highest scenic beauty by reason of their aridity (during three-quarters of the year) and comparative treelessness. Almost all land capable of cultivation is under the plough for the one annual rain crop, while rocky or precipitous areas are used for grazing. The whole plateau is now peopled with a density rare in Africa (though scanty enough by European standards) by long-settled and intensely land-devoted Coptic villagers.

The eastern escarpment of the plateau forms a distinct zone. In addition to the summer rains it benefits from the distinct rain system of the winter, and by the humidity of almost continuous winter fogs. The result is a total rainfall of some thirty-two inches, rising even to forty, with a semi-forest vegetation in contrast to the flatter and barer fields of the highlands. This is a narrow region of great natural beauty.

Every contrast is offered by the coastal plain and the low barren foothills into which, below the main escarpment, it merges inland. Here the rain, falling only in winter, does not exceed ten inches in the year and can well be half that amount—or none at all. The deficiency is ill compensated by the rain-fed



torrents which descend, on a few days of every year, from the highlands, and which here and there the plainsmen try to harness for rough-and-ready irrigation. The coastal plain runs with varying width—from ten to fifty miles—for the whole continuous length of the territory, broken only in one sector some miles south of Massawa, where the highlands jut eastward almost to the sea. Astride and north of this break the plain affords a scanty spring pasture, with a heavy grass crop in favoured places; but south of it, in the Dankali country, human and even animal life is barely supportable at all. The inability of the coastal plain in general to support any but the scantiest native population, under primitive pastoral conditions, is obvious enough. Europeans can live solely in the towns, and then only with easy access to the high hinterland.

The winter and spring climate of Massawa and Assab is pleasant, but the summer brings all the worst of Red Sea heat and humidity. The coast is barren and treeless, and without harbour save for those named. The same hard conditions and repellent landscape are found among the many flat islands off the coast, of which some twenty, out of a total of more than a hundred, are inhabited.

The next main zone or surface type to be considered is that of the northern, north-central, and mid-western massif of hill country. Its southern base lies in the hills (or rather, mountains) surrounding Keren, which stands at 4,500 feet of altitude or 2,500 feet below Asmara; its northern tip extends to the apex of the Eritrean triangle. Its three vertical zones, from east to west, are those of the *rora* or mountain plateau country, north and south of Nagfa and descending to the coast; the valley of the middle and lower Anseba; and the eastern bank of the middle Barka. This area, one-third of Eritrea, lacks both exact definition and internal uniformity. Its hills are higher and wilder to the south, where it attracts a greater rainfall: this, following the highland seasons, amounts to about sixteen inches in the year round Keren, and not more than twelve in Karora-Nagfa. To the north and east, where vegetation is lighter and

winter and spring drought can be serious, the level falls towards the coast and the Sudan, as it does westward also across the Barka. Except in torrent beds and rare fertile stretches, the northern and western two-thirds of the whole region is a desolate land of bare and thorny scrub-grown hills, incapable of agriculture and indeed, for half the year, of supporting life. Keren district is more beautiful, richer (though not rich) in winter crops and village-dwelling inhabitants. The climate is everywhere pleasant, and round Keren delightful.

The remaining principal area of Eritrea lies west and south-west of the River Barka, and both north and south of the Gash. Its boundaries are the Sudan and Ethiopian frontiers. The region covers about one-third of Eritrea. It has the same rainfall season as the highlands, but not more than twelve to fourteen inches are deposited, nor do the Little Rains contribute much. Although broken and undulating the general character of the country is far flatter than central Eritrea; especially so towards the Sudan frontier, but less between the Gash and Setit rivers. The vegetation is scanty thorn, except along river courses. These, except for a trickle in the Setit, cease to flow soon after the rains. Agriculture is widely practised, but supports only a part (perhaps a half) of the population, which is wholly pastoral towards the north; there, indeed, the surface is largely of light steppe bordering on desert. In the Gash-Setit quadrilateral, a settled country with comparatively heavy vegetation, there are stretches of forest with belts of deep grass. The climate is excessively hot in summer, with bad dust storms.

The varieties of physical land surface are reflected, to some extent, in traditional district names and in the Italian administrative divisions. The highlands form, fairly exactly, three of these; and they in turn perpetuate the rough boundaries of three ancient districts, those of Hamasien, Akkele Guzai, and Sarae, time-honoured marches of the Tigrai. The Dankali country, now divided between Eritrea and Ethiopia by the most absurd of frontiers, has always formed its own unit. The coast around and for fifty miles north of Massawa, and inland to the foothills, is

the traditional district of Samhar; farther north, to the Sudan frontier and deep into the hills westward, is the Sahil which depends on Keren. Keren area itself has been known in the past as that of Senheit or of Bogos; neither word is now in use. The western marches of Eritrea for centuries belonged to the Taka province of the old rulers of the Nile.

South of the present frontier were and are the Ethiopian districts of Kafta and Wolkait, across the Setit from the Kunama country; of Adi Abo and Shiré, across the Mareb west of Axum; and of Agamé, farther east up to the escarpment that overlooks the Dankali plain. All these form part of the great Tigray province or kingdom. The Tigray is homogeneous in language and culture with the highlands of Eritrea which, in history as in geography, formed for centuries an integral part of it. The western boundary of the Tigray is formed by the course of the rivers Takazzé and Tsellari, the eastern by the great escarpment, the southern by a line running east and west below Lake Ashangi.

Such unity or separateness as Eritrea (or the highland nucleus thereof) possessed or still possesses was marked, from the earliest modern times, by the expression *Mareb Mellash*, 'Across the Mareb', which served the Court and officers of Ethiopia to differentiate it from the rest of the Tigrinya-speaking northern areas of the kingdom. The expression is not yet dead. The quantity and quality of its content, in terms of unity or separateness—however assessed—were never of more significance to Eritrean politicians and those of its greater neighbour. The territory was also known in early days simply as the *Bahrmeder*, 'sea land'.



## II

### ORIGINS AND EARLIEST AGES

#### 1. *Hamite and Semite*

THE highlands of East Africa, well watered and forest grown in primeval times, may well have been among the earliest parts of the earth's surface to be populated.

The first inhabitants reveal nothing of themselves by artifacts or monuments. Wild and scanty, with an earliest stone-age culture, they belonged, perhaps, to a dark, short or pigmy race, widely diffused in Africa and probably in Europe until superseded by higher types.

Such supersession fell, in the future Ethiopia, to the lot of Hamitic-speaking folk, who were everywhere the great civilizers of primitive northern Africa. By no means uniform in culture and with dialects which had long ago developed into separate languages, the Hamitic speaker, spread through the ages over wide areas of Africa, has always been faithful to some at least negative physical traits—a level jaw, straight nose, thick but not everted lips, hair wavy and sometimes frizzy, thinnish beard, colour from light coffee to black. Waves of these folk, some comparatively pure in type, and others already crossed with negro or half-negro blood, entered the Nile valley, swept to the Red Sea shores, and climbed into Ethiopia at intervals over long periods. Better armed but still pastoral, they imposed themselves wherever they settled. They produced many blends, acquired elements of various cultures (little worthy of the name), adopted many languages, and split into branches soon forgetful of their common origin. Gradually Ethiopia and Eritrea became Hamitic countries, legitimate first cousins of the early Egyptians, second cousins of the Berbers and Tuaregs of North Africa, and (since the Hamite is a Caucasian) third cousins of the races of Europe. The negro blood which held its own in the Nile Valley (where half-Hamite blends prevailed) was

swamped in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and left traces only in skin colour and character traits.

Nothing is known of conditions among this folk in the days of the third or second millennium before Christ, when first the rulers of Egypt, in search of gold or slaves, were trading with the mysterious lands of Punt and Kush—that is, with the Yemen and Ethiopian shores. They emerge uncertainly into history only after the next main stage in their evolution—the coming of the Semites.

Semite and Hamite speakers are, physically, close together, and in language structure not remote. Their separation lies not far back in human pre-history. But their cultural paths had long diverged; and the crossing of the Red Sea by increasing groups of Semites from the eastern coast began, perhaps about 1,000 to 700 years before Christ, to create new possibilities in Eritrea. These invaders, fleeing from troubles at home or seeking wealth and easy conquest, came from the Sabaeen group of South Arabians. They lost no time in climbing from the Dahlak Islands, or the inhospitable coastlands of the Buri peninsula or Samhar, to the plateau. The scattered and scanty Eritreans and Ethiopians of the day could offer little resistance; they had neither arms nor organization, and for this the looting of their chattels, ivory, and children was the first penalty.

The newcomers this time were numerically fewer than the invaders, unlike the incoming Hamites of an age before: but they could revolutionize both daily life and political organization. They brought the camel, the horse, the sheep, new plants and cultivation methods, and unheard-of fashions in arms and house-building; they brought also the nucleus of a ruling class, and a knowledge of group life—almost of government—strange and formidable to the simple Hamitic herdsman.

Such groups increased and then consolidated, as rivalry or headmen's ambition developed and the old and new elements grew together. The name of one Sabaeen tribe, Habsh, or Habashat, became known abroad as the strongest faction: and while this gave its name to the future 'Abyssinia', another, of the

Ge'ez or Ag'azian, left theirs to the south-Arabian language which they spoke. By the end of the fourth century B.C. there was already, in Eritrea and the Tigrāi, a race, a nation, and a government. It was the kingdom of Axum, famous, powerful, and civilized in its day.

## 2. *Axum*

The progress of this power, made possible by the intrusion of Semitic culture and progress into sufficient elements of the long-settled Hamites, can ill be traced until another outside movement has given it both a further powerful stimulus and a link with the outside world. The expansion of the Ptolemies led, onwards from the third century B.C., to the foundation of a number of Red Sea trading-posts, and to trading or diplomatic journeys to the hinterland. Such was Adūlīs, the greatest of these posts or cities and a centre advanced in wealth and culture, founded near the later Zula, which bears its name: and such was Cohaitu on the plateau near Adi Caieh. From these penetrated to higher circles in Axum (and certainly to the ruling class) something of Greek language and the arts, though probably but little blood; while contact with the greater world both led to ambition of conquest and partly supplied the means for it. In the first century after Christ a king of Axum raided the burders of Egypt, and this was many times repeated.

From this same northern direction Hamitic invasions, whose beginnings were now long forgotten, were still in progress, though no longer upon a grand scale. Between Egypt and the northern limits of Axum's effective rule—that is, the Hamasien or possibly the Bogos hills—lay the deserts where, from the remotest age, have grazed those Beja tribesmen who, typical Hamites, are still there to-day. The northern branch of the same Beja were known by the Egyptians of the time—under the name of Blemmi or Blemmyes—as harriers of their southern borders; and later, as enemies of the Roman power, they earned the contemptuous notice of Edward Gibbon.

Between the southern Beja and the outlying pastoral subjects

of Axum relations were those of raid and counter-raid. The result was a persistent penetration of the highlands and of the coast by infusions of Beja blood. At the same time slave-raids carried out by Axum generals on the Nilotic or west-Ethiopian negro tribes would bring fresh blood-elements into the race: and the formation or survival of groups of half-separate type, or the imperfect assimilation, in remote back areas, of Hamite, aboriginal, and Semite, created the prototypes of those pockets of racial survival which are a feature of modern Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The Axum kingdom corresponded very little with the modern state of Ethiopia. It did not, in its golden age, extend southwards beyond the limits of the present Tigrāi, where, and in modern Eritrea, may be found the descendants of its warriors. Its continuity with the later 'Solomonid' dynasty of Ethiopia is a vainglorious and political claim. The conversion of Axum to Christianity dates from the fourth century A.D., when missionaries of Syrian race, followed by saints and preachers in abundance, planted the quickly growing seed of that monophysite doctrine to which Ethiopia has ever since been faithful; but paganism long lingered in the farther areas, and in some Jewry held its own.

The empire fell, or fell into obscurity, for reasons but partly known. Long-drawn and costly ventures of conquest and government in the Yemen ended in weakening failure: the Beja tribes hit back or flooded forward with fatal effect. The Muslim conquest of Egypt and the Red Sea obliterated the old markets and plunged the sea routes into confusion; disunion and enfeebled rule at home did the rest. After the seventh century the name of Axum is heard no more.

### 3. *The Dark Ages*

The fame of Axum—invasor of Egypt, conqueror and empire-builder in the Yemen, sharer in the Greek world culture of the day—is followed, for four centuries, by an impenetrable darkness over Eritrea and the Ethiopian highlands. Covered by this,

there was further Beja inroad from the north, further trickles of Sabaeen entry across the sea, with perhaps some going and coming of the Nilotic folk to the west; and, in the slow fusion of race on the plateau—a process never complete—the lately triumphant Semite elements perhaps yielded ground cultural or political to the Hamitic masses, or rather ceased—their cultural contribution once made—to be separately recognizable.

The resulting blend was not uniform throughout. Especially in the Amhara mountains, north of Tsana, there survived elements faithful to the Jewish faith first introduced by the Sabaeans (ancestors of the tenacious modern Falasha or 'black Jews' of that area), and other groups resistant to Semite influence and blood. These can be identified with the name Agau, which indeed has served some writers for the pre-Semitic Ethiopian at large. The Agau were centred in Amhara; they retained earlier forms of speech, and, as will be seen, a measure of self-consciousness ready to take political form. The Danakil—or the original layer or stratum of them—were already established in their present unenviable home, mixed with some little Arabian blood. The same is true of the Somalis, far to the south. Ancestors of the Nilotic Kunama and Baria (to-day compact in the south-western corner of Eritrea) escaped both Hamitic dominance and conversion to Christianity: in a larger area than their present, they remained an unassimilated half-aboriginal element, as which they survive to-day.

On the Eritrean plateau, southward-thrusting Beja were able for a time—perhaps, indeed, for centuries—to establish half-nomadic 'kingdoms' of that race. Yaqubi, the geographer of the ninth century, saw and recorded six such Beja states. One of these, still pagan, straddled the Barka valley and delta. Another occupied the Eritrean highlands, had adopted Christianity, and paid tribute to the king of Ethiopia.

In the heart of Ethiopia itself it is clear that with the decline of the Axum State the centre of governmental power moved southwards. The move could follow lines of penetration made familiar by many past journeys to the gold-mines of Wollega,

and now unchecked by any organized resistance. Thanks to their higher development, better arms, and greater cunning the Semitized folk or rulers of the Tigrāi, though worsted by adverse world conditions as a first-ranking State, found no difficulty in survival among the disunited savages of central Ethiopia. Their own civilization suffered; they ceased to build, to practise the arts, to coin money; they adopted the lower standards of their new primitive subjects. But in some fashion they maintained a State, and strengthened it (like Menelik of Shoa a thousand years later) by raids and conquests to the south. The process of reorientation and re-establishment was slow; three centuries of weakness and obscurity went by, until increasing enterprise, the pushing of military colonies to far-off areas and to the coast itself, renewed relations with the Yemen, and the unifying effect of their religion, produced a gradual revival. By A.D. 950 the new kingdom of Ethiopia, with its centre in Shoa or Amhara, was founded, growing, and formidable.

That it still confronted enemies and dangers, besides those of weakness or disruption from within, was shown by two events of the tenth and twelfth centuries. The first was an invasion, from an unknown quarter, by a people led by a legendary Queen Guedit, monstrous in her ferocity. She must represent some remembered incursion from the south or from the western fringes.

The second event was a change of dynasty, lasting for a century, in Ethiopia itself. Presumably by armed uprising, power was seized in about 1150 from the reviving monarchy by a dynasty of the Zagué people of Lasta district, a stronghold of the Agau. These, representing perhaps in some sense a revolt by unchanged Hamitic against Semite elements, not only retained the royal power for a century but adorned it by recognition in the Christian world abroad, by pious works and interventions in Jerusalem, and by church-building at home.

The Zagué dynasty was in its turn overthrown by an Amharic rebel. He claimed power and support by an appeal to the legitimacy (which he claimed himself) of the 'descendants of Solo-

mon'; a title which had for some time both during and since the Axum period been used by the Ethiopian King of Kings. It derives from the oft-told myth that the first King, Menelik I, was the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and had come to assume the government of Ethiopia escorted by representatives of the twelve tribes. This story is the national saga of Ethiopia. It has been repeated with full seriousness by centuries of loyal Ethiopians, and has proved an effective instrument of kingly statecraft.

#### 4. *The Ge'ez Languages*

Among the many contributions made to Africa by the invading Semite was the language of south Arabian or Sabaeen type (nearly related to Arabic and Hebrew) which they brought. It was known, from one of their own tribe names, as Ge'ez; and from it arose the presence, familiar to-day, of Semitic languages in Hamitic Ethiopia and Eritrea. The variety of these suggests firstly, that the recipient peoples may themselves have spoken a variety of Hamitic tongues; second, that Ge'ez was perhaps not in uniform dialect the language of the newcomers; thirdly, that it was imposed on the language of the Africans in varying degrees of thoroughness, according to the times and spaces of its spread, and to local resistances. Ge'ez at all events remained the only written language, and held (still holds) a unique position as the tongue of the Coptic Liturgy. It was also the common ancestor of the three languages spoken in modern times in northern Ethiopia and Eritrea—Amharic, Tigré, and Tigrinya.

Of these Tigrinya—unwritten until recent years—seems to represent the mixture of Ge'ez with the language of the Agau or Hamites of the northern plateau. Tigré is the simpler blend, nearer to Ge'ez but to-day still unwritten and not intelligible to Tigrinya-speakers. It was produced by contact with the Beja peoples of the coast and of the northern hills. Amharic, a written language, but perhaps the farthest from the parent tongue, resulted, farther south in Ethiopia, from a mixture of a Ge'ez already heavily modified in Axum times, with Shoan or

Sidama dialects. The language of the Axum empire, Greek in court circles, was probably a near approximation to *Tigrinya* among the people. Amharic became the State language of medieval and modern Ethiopia by reason of the southward re-orientation of the State. It is not spoken in modern Eritrea, where instead the Christian plateau folk speak *Tigrinya* (uniformly with the *Tigrai* districts), and the Muslim hill and plain folk speak *Tigré*.

Confusion has many times arisen, both in speech and writing, from common misuse of the words *Tigré*, *Tigrai*, and *Tigrinya*. The first of these has two meanings ; it is the language described above (which is also often known as *Hasa* or *Hassa*) and, secondly, it is used for the lower or serf-caste element of the Eritrean Muslim population themselves who speak it. *Tigrai* (for which the alternative form *Tigre* is for clearness best avoided) is the region or province of northern Ethiopia. *Tigrinya* is the language of the *Tigrai*, spoken also by the Christian highlanders of Eritrea. It has alternatively been called *Tigrái* ; but again this form, though claimed as more correct, must if used create confusion with the province-name.



### III

## FOUR CENTURIES OF ETHIOPIA

### 1. *The Ethiopian State*

OF the character of the Ethiopian State and monarchy, and the general fortunes of the people, sufficient accounts have been given by many hands. The present writer has no desire, nor is he well qualified, to add to these. Nevertheless, a considerable (and the most populous) area of Eritrea was, during the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries, an integral part of the Negus's dominions, while over other regions of it he had an occasional or varying authority. It is therefore necessary to the historian of Eritrea to convey some idea of the nature of the authority thus claimed and the power which claimed it, and of the history of the greater territory in so far as it included or affected the lesser.

Ethiopia is a great territory of Africa. It enjoys a superb climate, great natural advantages and a numerous population, and it is not remote from the great centres of civilization. It had attained in antiquity both power and culture, and its dominant race was never unconscious of its own essential unity. It is therefore reasonable to wonder, in passing, why the State made so little progress in medieval—and scarcely more in modern—times. The reasons must be sought in the isolation which, for mistaken motives, the territory imposed upon itself; in the unreceptive pride or arrogance of its people; and perhaps in some defect or essential limitation in the African character. The speculation cannot here be pursued; but it is clear that, if Ethiopia had ever attained the stature of which it might reasonably be thought capable, there would be no separate history of Eritrea.

We will pass to consider, first, the nature of the Ethiopian monarchy; then the type, considered politically or socially, of its subjects; and the reasons for which these became increasingly unwilling to accept the State in its own, or its original, concep-

tion. A summary of the main phases of Ethiopian political history from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century will then be given; and, finally, a view of the place of Eritrea in the empire during that period.

The monarchy, after its long eclipse and change of centre during the Dark Ages, revived in the thirteenth century in a peculiar form. The barbarous splendour of its court, its vast entourage of officials, women, and retainers, and its apparent wealth and enormous contrast with the squalid poverty around, were not proofs of strength, rather of weakness. Its strength lay in its religious sanction—closely identified as it was with monophysite Christianity, an island in Muslim and pagan Africa—and the descent of its monarchs from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Barbarous, tawdry, ignorant, fiercely egotistical, capricious, lacking any system and any organized machine for governing—but half-divine and the powerful upholder of the Church—the monarchy arose and remained

The rule of its subjects, even in its central highlands, was no easy task. The territory fell into great regions or provinces—Amhara, Tigrai, Shoa, Gojjam—with a rough geographic unity, often an exclusive point of doctrine, a common language, and a strong regional tradition or consciousness. Within these, and composing them, lay districts, each again with unity and a name and a sense of solidarity reinforced by actual kinship among the *endas* (kinship groups) whose settlements peopled their countryside. As political consciousness—and the desire for rights, and the capacity to resist—grew outwards from *enda* to district, from district to region or province, so were the difficulties of a repressive and rapacious central government ever increased.

And meanwhile, other and powerful centrifugal influences were at work. The monarchy, conscious of no duties towards its subjects, and powerless to conceive an obligation to serve or benefit them, failed even to protect them. The country was conquered and ravaged by Muslims, invaded and occupied by pagan tribes. The royal power failed even in defence, and its aggressive might was shown only against weak half-subject

peoples on its own fringes, or heretics or minorities within them. It failed, in fact, in the most elementary of its duties.

Next, the Church failed no less. The support of this, as an instrument of the royal power, was the sole item of formulated policy known to Ethiopian statecraft: yet the Abuna and his priests and monks, with their vicious lives and worldly striving, their barren ritual and controversies, their vain and often absurd formalism, failed first as a spiritual force, then equally as an instrument of policy.

Thus, in spite of all its advantages, the Ethiopian State failed to overcome the difficulties—and in particular the centrifugal tendencies—with which it was confronted: and, by the middle of the eighteenth century, such failure was wholly apparent.

## *2. Stages in Ethiopian History: the first and second*

The history of the territory during the centuries now under review is inevitably one of the rise, struggles, and decline of a central monarchy which failed to grow to its opportunities or to modify its conceptions with changing times. The phases of this history are three. The first extends from the thirteenth to the early sixteenth century, the second from then until the mid-seventeenth. The third phase covers the hundred years beginning about 1660.

During the first phase society was grouped in the smallest units; political consciousness did not exist. Local ambition was, at worst, the ambition not to be oppressed. The power of the King of Kings was, therefore, adequate to the task of maintaining his position and authority. He could appoint and dismiss his governors, receive his tributes, support his court. He could push outwards his areas of control, become paramount through most of modern Ethiopia. He could inflict on the Muslim principalities forming, as potential dangers, on his southern and south-eastern flanks, defeats which appeared decisive. Relations were established with the Papacy, and a mission of Franciscans received (however coldly) at the court

of Ethiopia in 1482. In this period the most famous kings were Yekuno Amlak (1270-85), Amda Tsion (1314-40), and Zara Yakub (1433-68). The monarchy, however primitive and faulty, was at its best, and its difficulties as yet ungrown.

In the second phase the sixteenth century witnessed the greatest dangers of the State, and the beginning of its decline. The Turks occupied the Eritrean coast, and repeatedly, though without final success, tried to establish their forces on the plateau. The Somali principality of the south-east (first of Ifat, then of Adal, then of Harrar) mustered its forces under a leader of genius—Ahmad bin Ibrahim, surnamed Gran, the Left-Handed—and invaded, ravaged, conquered, and occupied the whole of Ethiopia. Deliverance came from a handful of Portuguese, whose arrival as allies, when all seemed lost, reversed the position and saved the State.

But the expulsion of the enemy, the salvation of Ethiopia for Christendom, brought no fruits of victory. The State and monarchy never fully recovered. Firstly, the sight of Christians in tens of thousands accepting Islam for self-salvation—the Church powerless to dissuade them—struck an almost fatal blow at the moral power of local Christianity; the king, thereafter, lost half the use of his strongest weapon. Secondly, the royal authority was profoundly shaken, and with district and regional consciousness increasing and the old traditional subservience grown less, the Negus's task of maintaining his authority, collecting his tribute, called for continual campaigns of repression and punishment. Thirdly, the weakness and apathy that followed the Muslim wars allowed the entry, in vast numbers, of Galla tribesmen from the south. The need of these to expand into fresh pastures corresponded in time with the weakness of the Ethiopian State and they entered scarcely opposed, penetrated far and wide, and remained to form great Galla communities in all parts of the territory. Pagan and primitive herdsmen, they contributed nothing to its civilization, but brought only a fresh unassimilable element into its politics.

### 3. *The Closing of the Doors*

To this period belong all but the first of that series of Catholic missions to Ethiopia which, had they finally succeeded, might have done much to civilize and modernize the country—and through which it first became known to Europeans. The mission which spent 1521–6 in Eritrea, and whose historian was Alvarez, had been invited ten years earlier by an Ethiopian delegate sent by Queen Helena to Rome; but even before its arrival the royal policy had changed, and it could achieve nothing. Next, in 1535, at the crisis of the Muslim wars, came the dispatch to Rome and Lisbon, from a distracted Negus, of the patriarch Bermudez with an urgent request for armed help against the infidel, and the promise of acceptance by all Ethiopia of the Pope's authority. The chance seemed favourable: both Pope and king could hope for great results in the hard-pressed country of Prester John. The result was the Portuguese expedition, equipped and dispatched from Goa, which landed at Massawa in 1641 and by its prowess saved Ethiopia as by a miracle. But the Negus withheld the prize: for himself and for his country, he refused Catholicism.

Fifteen years later—the Ethiopian College having been founded at the Vatican meanwhile—another mission left Europe for Ethiopia, entrusted this time to the newly formed order of the Jesuits. Under Bishops Nunez Barreto, Oviedo, and Carnero, it arrived in Eritrea in 1557. Again its hopes were disappointed. Loud outcry against the Catholic faith was raised by the Coptic clergy even before the mission appeared, and long continued. The Negus Claudius refused conversion, and Minas his successor repelled it with yet greater firmness. The missionaries left the court and formed a colony at Fremona near Axum. Oviedo died in 1577, Fernandez and then Lobo in turn succeeded him. In 1597 none but an Indian prelate, de Silva, could be found to guide the Catholic community.

This was still active, on a humble scale, at the arrival in 1603 of the pious and prudent Paez. He was a Spanish Jesuit, and

might succeed (it was supposed) where the Portuguese had failed. He founded a Catholic school and found the Negus of the time, Za Dengel, not unfavourable; the king offered, indeed, to accept Spanish forces along all the Ethiopian sea-board. Susenyos his successor fully and openly accepted the religion of the missionaries, became their convert and champion, and sent letters to the Vatican and the court of Spain.

But Ethiopia refused. The forces of conservatism and suspicion, mobilized by the Coptic clergy, broke out in widespread rebellion and civil strife. No efforts of the brusque and rigid Mendez, who joined the mission in 1625, nor of d'Almeida could hold Susenyos firm in his new allegiance against nationwide rejection and uprising. He recanted, and Fasil his successor turned in wrath upon the Catholics. Persecution and expulsion followed. It was the end.

A Protestant attempt, in the person of Peter Heyling in 1640, fared no better. Last efforts by Capuchins from Cairo led only to martyrdom. Ethiopia refused the Roman and the Lutheran faiths, clung to the Coptic Church with all its follies and weaknesses intact, and even, in fear of contamination, bade the Turkish Pasha at Massawa prevent the entry of any stranger.

Doctrine and Church government apart, the refusal of all European contacts, the sealing of Ethiopia within its own boundaries of ignorance and backwardness, was a policy grave with consequences.

#### 4. *The Third Phase*

The second phase of Ethiopian history, then, was one of deadly struggle, which left disastrous consequences, and of refusal to emerge into the open air of civilization. The notable rulers of the period were Lebna Dengel (1508-40), Claudius (1540-59), Malak Sagad (1561-97), Susenyos (1607-32), and Fasil (1631-67).

The third phase begins with the withdrawal of the royal court to Gondar, under Fasil, in 1660. This move, significant in the orientation of the country, was caused by the endless disorders

of the kingdom, and by the disturbance of the Galla settlements. It marked a new though unspoken admission of powerlessness by the central power. The process of crystalization into larger homogeneous units—compact districts, then whole provinces—was advancing. Greater resources of men and wealth were, or could be, at the disposal first of regional leaders, now often hereditary, and then of any adventurer with character and boldness. The forces of disobedience, of disruption, had grown and were growing still, the monarchy had grown in nothing. Indeed, few rulers of the stature of the early Solomonids were to appear again, and in wealth and arms the rebel or pretender had now less inferiority to his master than ever before.

The result of these conditions was a decline in the effective power of the Negus in and after the early eighteenth century, and an increase in that of his greater subjects. It was not at once apparent. An outstanding ruler, such as Yasu the First (the Great), could appear as strong as any predecessor; but such appearance was not reality. Increasingly the monarch had recourse to the support of some section of his subjects against the rest, while his religious status as Solomon's descendant served only to protect and sanctify his person, not to fortify his authority. Of the effects of these fortunes on such outlying parts of the empire as the Mareb Mellash, much is obvious or can be assumed, and something will appear in the history of Eritrea itself.

### 5. *Effects in Eritrea*

The arrivals and departures of missions were a local event familiar to Eritreans little interested in their controversies. The invasion by Muslim armies convulsed and ravaged the countryside of Hamāsiēn and Sarāe; and salvation, when it came, came first by way of Massawa. The Galla invaders never reached this territory, but the displacements and migrations which they produced were deeply felt north of the Mareb. The second phase of Muslim invasion (that of the Turks seeking to occupy the Highlands) belongs to the local history of Eritrea and will

be so recorded; and with it the other moves of Turk and Beja, Fung Emperor and Egyptian, whose record belongs to the same pages

The effect of succeeding phases of strength and weakness in the monarchy was felt less obviously in far-off Eritrea than nearer to the court. The evolution of local society into larger and more formidable units, as will be later seen, was itself (because occurring in all other regions at the same time and place) a cause and an effect of the changing condition of the empire: and was far clearer in its local effects than in the remoter changes it was producing upon the central State. A strong or the weakest Negus could equally raid and chastise a frontier tribe, or put down a petty district governor; could confer a title, be gracious to a suppliant. Indeed, the prestige of the King of Kings remained high in Eritrea long after he had become a powerless puppet, and Eritreans had access to him at Gondar after their own territory was no more than a sub-province of the Tigrai.

From the fourteenth to the eighteenth century Eritrea was a remote area of the empire, peopled in part by a race of Ethiopian type homogeneous with the Tigrai, in part by strangers on whom the royal authority was slight or nothing. The plateau area of the territory kept, in general, its direct dependence on the central government until the eighteenth century was well advanced. The rule of the Negus in it was no more developed, no more enlightened, than elsewhere; indeed, the special position of Eritrea as the coast-belt and gateway of Ethiopia—and the long occupation of that gateway by a foreign power—deprived the central government of such monopoly of power as could otherwise have been theirs.

At no time did civilizing influences reach Eritrea from the Ethiopian State. The standards of daily life, at all levels, were of the lowest. Refinement, even the most elementary comfort, was unknown. The existence of the common people was not far from savagery, power was everywhere abused, all rules of morality as of good taste were flouted. Ethiopia produced no



literature, since the few dreary records of miracles, saints, or devotions cannot deserve the name; and literacy was confined to a part of the priesthood. No science or form of knowledge was pursued; such mental energy as existed was wasted on the endless and half-grotesque disquisitions of theology, from which no peril of the State, no crying need of the times could divert the frequent synods at the royal court. Ethiopian art is a barbarized offspring of Byzantine, with added (and often curious) conventions of its own. Neither in painting nor architecture was any work produced capable of refining or uplifting the people.

## IV

### ERITREA—FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

#### 1. *Climate and Tradition*

FROM this summary review of main Ethiopian fortunes we turn now, as to our principal concern, to a study of Eritrea itself early in the same period. It will be considered how far, and in what manner, Eritrea was directly affected by, or shared in, Ethiopian history, and how far it is just to treat the two territories, in this age, as integrally one. In particular, and with precedence over the visible events of politics, we shall examine the building-up of the Eritrean communities from such origins as we can assign to them.

The influence of land surface and physical conditions in each part of the territory has always been great. These have largely determined the character of the inhabitants and led inexorably to the choice of a pastoral or an agricultural life. In Eritrea it is likely that, five or six centuries ago, rainfall was greater than it is; in the *rora* or mountain plateau districts around Nagfa there are traces of wells and terraces which suggest an ancient agriculture no longer possible to-day; and the greater highland forests of that period may have been produced by a heavier humidity, as well as destroyed since by the improvidence of posterity. The Islamic civilization of the Dahlak Islands in medieval times, in which we cannot but reluctantly believe, could scarcely have been supported by the bare and desolate islands as we see them now. But with this sole change of physical circumstance we can safely visualize the Eritrea of the earlier centuries as it is to-day.

The distinction between settled village dweller on the plateau and higher hills, and pastoral semi-nomad or nomad in the lowlands, is not the only one to which the structure of Eritrea gave rise. The two climates have had the further result of restricting

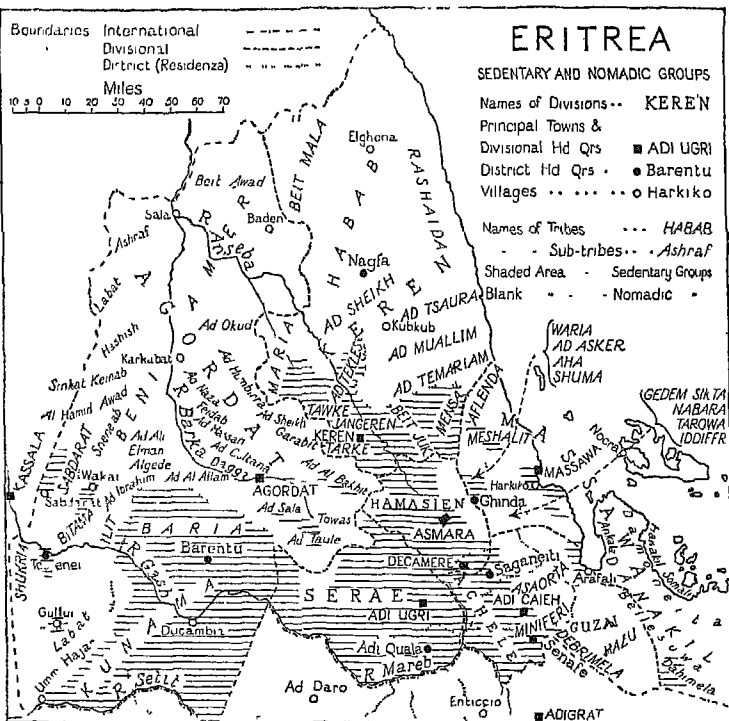
migration by the highlanders to the fringes of the plateau as their outward limit. Such limitation does not apply in the reverse direction: Sudanis may and do dislike the cold of the highlands, but it has not stopped Beja—nor indeed other Hamitic—immigration. It has produced the result that Ethiopian blood—so for brevity to label that of the Semitized Hamite, with Negro origins and traces, of the Tigrai and Eritrean highlands—has spread decreasingly as the lower levels are reached, and never across the present Sudan border or into the plains of Dankalia. In recognizing folk of ‘Ethiopian’ origin—or partly such—it may be emphasized in passing that the test is physical, with such reinforcement as tradition and legend can afford: linguistic or religious it can never be, since in these respects the communities have proved repeatedly faithless to their origins. Moreover, in most of the Eritrean peoples there is a clear racial distinction between ruling caste and the common folk.

Proposing, then, a general view of the Eritrean communities as they existed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, we will begin with the ‘Ethiopian’ elements and the people recognizably blended therewith.

The hard core of these occupied, of course, the highlands and spread, perhaps less diluted at that age than to-day, for some distance northwards into the Keren mountains. They had, and they retain to-day, substantial identity with the southern Tigrai folk, equally descendants of the subjects of Axum—with the same blood-blend, similar living-conditions, the same language and culture. Yet there were not unimportant differences, and these deserve careful note. Firstly, sharing in general the legend of Sheba and Menelik, the Eritreans and Tigraeans differed in detail in the parts they claimed in it. In Eritrea, legend said, was the stream where the Queen drank, the spot where Menelik was born, while the inhabitants themselves descended from specific tribes of Israel. The absurdity of such beliefs, which are not dead to-day, does not diminish their hold on popular feeling in claimed superiority of descent. Secondly, a body of less remote and less improbable legend is accepted by the plateau-dwellers

to-day and (apart from innumerable group and village legends, to be considered later) distinguishes them from the outside world. Such is the saga of Meroni, descendant of Menab (or Benjamin), the captain of the host of Menelik himself. Meroni (who may be in part historical) left the Dembea district of Amhara about the year 1350, to settle in the Gashinashim district of the Hamasien. From his three sons descend the eponymous fathers of many or most of the main stocks in the modern Hamasien and Akkele Guzai, which thus claim a parenthood glorious in itself and exclusive of their Tigraean neighbours. Such stories could be multiplied. That of Meroni suffices to indicate the use and strength of tradition, usually genealogical, in building a people's self-consciousness and turning all others into foreigners.

A more general word may be said, in passing, of popular myth and story among these peoples. It is normal to find a family or kinship tradition in every group, and a derivation—varying from unlikely to fantastic—for every place-name; but it is not easy to assess the historical content of these. The claim of Coptic groups to descent from this or that tribe, this or that honourable origin, is matched by the claim of the Muslim tribesman (even the most recent convert) to descent from a Mecca notable or the Prophet himself. Other legends are not merely snobbish; they serve the purpose of establishing a claim to land, kinship with a powerful supporter, or the exclusion of a rival claimant; or they explain, too naively, a present custom or anomaly. The first easy reaction is to reject them all. Yet some are not wholly false, and many contain a name or a suggestion which ought to be significant. They should, no doubt, be examined with care and sympathy, in the hope that they will yield some morsel of historical truth. The same, in passing, is true of many of the records left by European travellers, who, with unique chances to observe and report, too often record foolish or muddled tales, mistaken names, the claims or ignorances of chance informers.



## 2. *The Major Immigrations, Fourteenth to Fifteenth Centuries*

Tradition apart, what element of difference (we began by asking) can be established between Eritrean highlander and Tigraean—or, less narrowly, what influences were at work, on the Eritrean plateau we are now considering, to give the Eritrean a distinctive character? The map supplies the evident and immediate answer.

The nearer to the centre of the Ethiopian highlands and their vigorous intrusive peoples, the greater the stream of invasion therefrom, by groups or by single families. The Tigrai therefore, however separate in language from Amhara and Agau, was exposed (especially in a period of scanty population and no control) to constant influx from alien neighbours. This influx was different both in quality and in volume, we can assume, from the similar infiltration into Eritrea, though the latter was also recurrent and considerable. Scores of kinship groups in Eritrea to-day claim origin in an ancestor immigrant from Tembien, Shiré, or Agamé, while many a group of virile Agau throughout the dark and middle ages sought new homes in the Hamasien or Sarae, bringing always his legend of high ancestry. This regular infusion of new blood from the Ethiopian highlands, including the Tigrai itself, is an important element in the modern Eritrean. The largest and most obvious of Agau immigrations—that of the Bilein—occurred later than the age we are now considering.

It is balanced by similar immigration from the north-west. The Beja tribes, often referred to, are indeed a significant and little-changing element in Eritrean history, as age-long neighbours, occasional conquerors, and suppliers of an important man-power contribution. Indeed, the main prehistoric invasion of the Ethiopian plateau and coasts by Hamitic peoples—the creation of Ethiopia itself—was the work of peoples strictly similar to the Beja. The ninth-century Beja State (or States) on Eritrean soil was perhaps shortlived; but it, and centuries of penetration before and after, could not but modify the Ethio-

pian-type peoples of the plateau to a sensible extent. Those of the plateau fringes—the pastoral peoples of the Nagfa hills and the Barka valley—were, in the fourteenth century, predominantly Beja in race, with some Ethiopian affinities; and later changes of legend, religion, and habit have not altered this. The Samhar tribes were an equal blend of both elements.

A special phase of Beja immigration is somehow contained in the traditions, which in outline are true to history, of the Belu clan or clans. That these were of Beja origin is certain; that they entered Eritrea as pagans, and soon (at latest by the fifteenth century) adopted Islam on the coast and Christianity elsewhere, not less so: and, for centuries, leading families in the territory were proud to claim this origin. It has indeed been suggested, but with little probability, that the ancient wells and terraces found in the northern hills are the relics of Belu occupation; others, associating the name Rom (by which these traces are designated) with its usual meaning of 'European', attribute them to inland enterprises of the Adulis or Cohaitu folk. In any case, the Belu were, from their first appearance, a dominant as well as a numerous element. Their traces are found in group or family origins, in tombs and place legends, throughout the highlands. Unquestionably they supplied, for long years, a ruling class to the Bani Amir tribesmen whose habitat was and is the western lowlands of Eritrea, while they assumed the leadership equally of the tribal elements along the coast. They settled in strength at Harkiko (known also for centuries as Dogono or Dohona), the village port just south of Massawa, and were in such predominance there that the incoming Turks, as we shall see, made immediate use of their authority.

The nature of the Belu pretensions was similar to that of those Ethiopian families, whose like advent to fresh areas, in a position of command, we shall shortly study. It explains both their assumed authority and accepted claim to nobility, and their later fall from eminence in all areas save that of Massawa. Always a minority, they failed to withstand the advent of later elements, in various and now unremembered forms, and disappeared

among the mass of the people. But it tells nothing of the date of their invasion. This was probably not less than a century before the first Turkish landings in 1517, and probably much more. It cannot reasonably be identified with the ninth-century Beja 'kingdom'.

We pass from this consideration of Agau and Beja penetration in Eritrea—the latter a major element from which the Tigrāi is exempt—to others which have made a lesser contribution to the highlands. None is more obvious than the maritime position of the territory, which has always given it a unique place in the Ethiopian world. The latter country has been debarred by nature from the sea by wide deserts—or at best by bush-grown wilderness—on every side, and these inhabited by alien races: only in the neighbourhood of Massawa does the highland closely approach the coast. One result has been the easy penetration of Eritrea by seaborne or sea-regarding influences. Strangers from overseas have landed, merchandise has come and gone, the prevailing religion of the Red Sea and of the east has entered. Even in the centuries we are now studying, a flourishing Muslim civilization was centred at the Dahlak Islands and at Massawa. The Dahlak State had been on terms with the far-off Abbasid Khalifate of Baghdad, claimed to rule part of the Yemen coast, and offered (it is said) a refuge to poets and philosophers of the Faith. This could not but influence coastlands and highlands alike; and from the port originated in part those communities of Muslims—far superior to the Copt, as they still are, in trade and in affairs—which were already found in Debarua and other settlements of Eritrea and the Tigrāi. Descendants of these (and in part perhaps also of the earliest Muslim refugees of the Prophet's own age) are the present-day Jiberti.

Another influence can be imagined in the presence of military garrisons consisting of levies (otherwise than local) at the disposal of the ruler (such as those sent by Negus Zara Yakub to quell disorder in 1450) and the racial mixture which these have always involved; and still another in the descendants of refuge-taking families, or even whole clans, in this remotest of the Negus's



dominions. The presence of Coptic monasteries was a socially stabilizing element, though some going and coming of newcomers would result. The best example is the celebrated monastery of Bizen. This, on the pinnacle of the mountain so named some miles seaward of Asmara, was founded by a monk Filepos in the thirteenth century and achieved immediately both wealth and fame. Its cultural influence on the Coptic world of Eritrea has always been eminent, and its prior and monks—already nine hundred strong at the death of the founder—took a leading part in the theological controversies of Ethiopia.

### 3. *Highland Society*

Such were migrations and influences which had affected and were still affecting the composition of the plateau people. That there were others, in the form of small-scale racial movement, is certain; but the evidence for these is too slight even for generalization. There are, in surviving names and dim traditions, hints of other and perhaps earlier (or merely more completely vanished) peoples: the Cabota, related to the Danakil, and neighbours of the present Saho-speaking folk on the coast and the escarpment south of Massawa; the Asfada, Almada, and Haffara, clans and tribes who ranged the northern hills before the arrival of the present ruling caste. the Kelu clans, of Beja origin and associated with the Belu (unless, as others think, the Kelu are in fact an aboriginal element), and the more widespread Agazi, whom some identify as almost the earliest of all dwellers on the plateau, later compressed and submerged until slight traces only remain. Little purpose, however, is served by a mere chronicle of such names without present meaning.

The social picture of the highland folk, at this early age, can be drawn with little confidence. The change from pastoral to agricultural life was far advanced in those peoples who had been long domiciled there. Land shortage—fundamental condition of latter-day Eritrea, and basis of its social system—did not yet exist. Agriculture was characterized by infrequent moves of a whole community from land to land, which fresh forest clear-

ance produced in abundance. Pastoral life persisted in the same settlements, as it always will when there is space and demand for both: the villager has thus his milk, meat, and leather as well as grain. No exclusiveness against newcomers—a feature of later days—was yet felt; there was land for all. Predominance did not yet depend on the possession of land, but on strong arms.

At the same time, centuries of government and nearness to an imperial centre, and the vicinity of a more advanced Muslim State, had led the people far from savagery. Interventions by the local royal representative might be few, but the life of communities, left to themselves and democratically ruled by elders with no super-village grouping, was controlled by rules both of procedure and of customary law; by an earlier form, in fact, of the traditional codes of the present day. And beside these stood the Coptic priests, wielding their weapons of fear and excommunication, and the royal governor himself.

Already dominant, as it was always to remain, was the conception of the *enda*, or kinship group, as the essential form of social organization. Lying at the basis of all land tenure in later days, it was already the vehicle of tradition, the unit of combined residence and economy, round which all loyalty and interest centred. By his *enda* was a man known, it established his consequence and ensured his rights. With the single family too small a unit, and the mixed or many-*enda* village too large—if indeed yet conceivable—the single *enda* still held the field.

#### 4 *The Fringes*

Off the highlands proper but still within the areas congenial to the Ethiopian type, were found communities in which that race was a greater or lesser element, in the Keren mountains. This admixture, greater in the southern and higher region, grew less towards the north, where the Beja stock remained almost pure. The Keren area became agricultural only at a later period: and in the scanty pastoral folk who roamed it in early modern times, it is hard to say at what stage the family

gave way to a larger group as the social unit. Some sort of self-protecting system was doubtless evolved in early days—before the advent of the later ruling caste—in response to dangers of raiding from the Baria and the nearer Beja. Beyond a few folk-names, purporting to be those of early or the earliest inhabitants, and the general probabilities of the age, nothing can be known of these peoples and their life. That a part of the Keren area was occupied by immigrant Agau elements still intact as such—precursors of the Bilein movement—is highly probable: and not less, that the pagan Baria still held a portion, prior to their constriction westward to their present homes.

Northwards in the districts of the modern Kubkub, Nagfa, Karora, the scanty grazing sections, Tigré-speaking though in blood predominantly Beja, continued to witness the infiltration through their pastures of elements from the north-west into the coastal areas, and to descend thither themselves for the winter grazing. These were people without a history, until, two centuries later, new elements were to give them an organization and a name. Meanwhile, they were few and wild. Islam and Christianity disputed for their allegiance, and paganism was not dead.

Along the coast, the Sahūl was uninhabited save by the winter migrants. Southwards from it, the Samhar had already assumed its present racial complexion—an Ethiopian-Beja blend, with prevalence of the latter. The presence of Islamic society at Massawa and the islands, and the nearness of the Yemen and Hijaz, no doubt attracted these people early to Islam. That there was continued immigration from Arabia is probable enough (since it has never ceased), but nothing is known of this save through pedigree legends, which will appear later. Harkiko was, at this age, probably a greater centre than Massawa. It has better water, and the Massawa and Taulud Islands were, of course, still unjoined by the dykes which create the modern harbour. Only Massawa Island itself, and not the mainland, was yet regularly inhabited.

Farther south again, where the coastal belt disappears on the shores of the Gulf of Zula—and up and across the escarpment

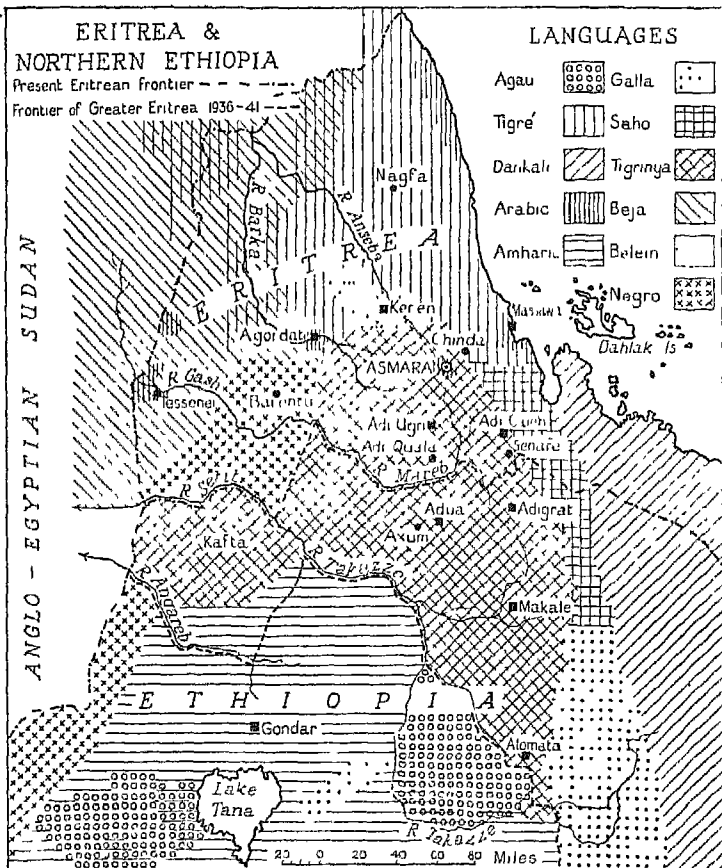
of the plateau inland—is the present home of the Saho tribes: the Shiho, Shoho or Choho of early travellers. It is indicated by their fame as wardens and blackmailers on all the upland paths from the coast, and the place they hold in the memory of many travellers, that their extent and power were far greater, centuries ago, than they are to-day. They dominated the Samhar and the eastward mountain slopes from Ghinda to Senafé. Some of the tribal elements which comprised the Saho nation—for instance, the Doba, known to James Bruce—have disappeared, and indeed nothing can be known of their early structure. They may have contained elements drawn from old Adulis, and cannot have escaped Dankali and Yemen infiltration, perhaps conquest; but essentially, with their type and the strange Hamitic language spoken by them alone of men, they cannot but represent a fragment of early invading Hamitic stock, as do their neighbours the Danakil. From the latter they differ in habit as well as language; but their location astride the mountains may well be due to the dominant and lucrative position which they thus achieved as highwaymen, and to the superior grazing of the higher levels.

The Dankali people, of which a part only belongs to Eritrea and that solely in a political sense, are of the same main branch of early Hamitic peoples as the Saho and the Somali. Muslims, with their own Afar language, they are forced by their appalling terrain to a wholly pastoral life. They have suffered little Ethiopian infiltration, but through the raiding of their women and children as slaves by the Tigrai highlanders have themselves contributed to the plateau stock. Their own origin legends confirm the sea-borne south Arabian influences and immigrations which would be naturally expected; they connect their language and race name, Afar, with Ophir. Ignoring their actual origins and colour, the Danakil claim that their ancestors were 'white' and from Arabia; and the incoming of a fair-skinned ruling caste from Yemen, at some period, is indeed likely enough. The subsequent arrival in the same country of the 'Red' Danakil seems to have so far an historical basis, that it will be kept for the

later page to which it belongs. Meanwhile, the meagre life of the race, with its goats and fishing, its sandy and volcanic wilderness, its devotion to Islam, its age-long fear of highland raiders, had little connexion with the ambitious stirring of the Somali—and in part Dankali—principalities farther south, which were already menacing the Ethiopian power.

On the other flank of Eritrean territory, west of the central plateau, dwelt then as now a racial element wholly different. The two communities of the Kunama and the Baria (known jointly as Shankalla to many travellers) have characteristics unlike any other in the territory, or indeed in northern Ethiopia. They are physically dark, negroid in feature, and shortish or stocky, differing in body as in culture from all their neighbours. The Baria have admitted some foreign elements—families of Belu or Bani Amir origin, or from Shiré or Gondar—though insufficiently to modify the type. The Kunama, also known as Baza, have been shyer and more exclusive. They speak two similar but distinct dialects, the Baria another language, and to none of these can a classification be confidently assigned; they are called generally Nilotic. The religion of the two groups has diverged since the Baria conversion to Islam, much later: in early days it was closely similar, with a strong element of ancestor-worship and of propitiation, through hereditary castes, of the forces or spirits destructive of crops and herds. The use of animal symbols for certain clans and families is widespread. The clans possess powers special to each, and are exogamous; they play no part in the administrative organization. Social grouping was, at the age of which we speak (and in the Kunama is still) by small settlements, with no intercommunity bond save that of common language and the need of protection. Descent is reckoned on the mother's side, and indeed the influence of the women approximates to matriarchy.

Both of the groups represent, no doubt, the remnants of a wide earlier population, perhaps of the pre-Hamitic natives of the whole territory. To have been, with but slight admixture of new blood, gradually driven from successive areas and reduced



in numbers by invaders better armed and resentful of their refusal to be converted, would account well for the situation in which history discovers them. Their last hold on the Keren mountains was taken from them by Agau invaders in perhaps the fifteenth or sixteenth century, while they lost their last land in the Sarae to the same rivals. Their history for the next four centuries was one of brutal raids by stronger neighbours, and it is reasonable to think that it had been the same already for centuries.

The later and final home of the Baria lies north of the Gash river, and east of the Sudan frontier. Still farther north and bounded to the east by the Barka valley is to-day the home of the tribe group, or nation, of the Bani Amir. We have referred already to the assumption, among the ancestors of these, of a dominant position by the Belu clan of the Beja; and this, no doubt, marked an important step towards unifying their scattered groups. Such union, incomplete even to-day, was no easy task since the constituents, primitive and self-sufficient, were partly of pure Beja stock and To Badawi language, partly of mixed Ethiopian blood and Tigré language; partly accepting the near-matriarchy of the Beja—whose ladies ruled at home with a famed severity—partly the patriarchal system of the Keren tribes. Nor, probably, was the nation yet near to their final general adoption of Islam.

In Belu times, however, the first common legends of ancestry were repeated: how Sayid Amir bin Kunnu, of the inevitable noble stock of Arabia, had crossed the sea to Suakin and given unity and a name to the tribe. His marriage to a Belu woman is an obvious face-saving addition by that clan. The story exists to explain the name Beni Amir, and need not be taken seriously; another, to supply a historic basis for the successors of the Belu, will be told later. The régime of an aristocratic and a serf class within the groups, certain result of the immigration of powerful newcomers, was already established, though the Belu were not to hold that privileged position for ever.

Before the rise of the Fung power at Sennar in the sixteenth

century there was no strong rule on the middle Nile; the great Beja group, stretching from Egypt to the Red Sea and Eritrea, had no overlord. Their sea outlet, since the destruction of Aidhab by the Sultan of Egypt in 1426, was Suakin. This city, for centuries a rival of Massawa in Red Sea trade, grew rapidly in the following century in the hands, like Massawa, of Muslim settlers from elsewhere than the African mainland. Inland of it, the Beja tribesmen were forming slowly into their modern groups—Bisharin in the north, Amarat in the Port Sudan hinterland, Hadendowa from Sinkat to the Gash delta.

### 5. *Rulers and Visitors*

The great movements of Ethiopian history which closely concern Eritrea belong to the sixteenth and later centuries. Prior to these there is but little in Eritrea to be recorded in the sphere of politics or war.

As early as 1402 Antonio Partoli journeyed to Ethiopia by way of Suakin, Eritrea, and Axum. The map made by Fra Mauro, in the same age, shows already 'Amasen' (Hamasiën), 'Serana' (Sarae), and the Takazzé. He notes how this river changes (as it still does) its name from region to region.

An event which must have been widely commented on in Massawa and Debarua—and more critically at Bizen—was the passage through Massawa in 1480 of a delegation sent by the Negus with letters to the Sultan of Egypt. Its object was to visit Jerusalem and 'Greece' and procure priests for service in Ethiopia; but in effect it visited Rome and the Pope instead. The result was a hopeful mission of Franciscans to the King of Kings, Brothers Sagara, John of Calabria, and John-Baptist of Imola. The mission, without Sagara who died at Cairo, came by the Nile and desert route to Suakin, thence to Eritrea and on to Ethiopia. It could accomplish nothing; but it marks a stage in European knowledge of the territory. That this was little enough is proved by the adventures of Peter de Covilham and a companion, sent by the King of Portugal to open relations with 'Prester John'. The mission knew not even in what continent



to seek this mysterious priestly monarch. They left Europe in 1487, visited Egypt, Suakin, and Aden. His companion killed, de Covilham reached India, explored East Africa, returned to Cairo. Finally, by way of Sinai, Jedda, and Zeila, he reached the Negus, who received him honourably but detained him for the rest of his life. His captivity was not solitary. Some fifty Europeans—Italian, Greek, Levantine—had somehow penetrated to the court of the King of Kings, seeking fortune or adventure. None of these was permitted to return, but, well treated and with households of the country, they wielded a varying influence over the king and his advisers. Almost all must have passed through Eritrea.

The entertainment and escort of such rare visitors was a duty, no doubt, of the royal governor of Eritrea. His others were the administration, by whatever code or procedure, of the higher justice whensoever invoked; and, more constantly, the collection of taxes on the king's behalf (or his own), with the raising of such levies as ex-soldiers or accessible villagers might afford. The ruler of the Bahrmeder used the title of Bahr Negash—Lord of the Sea—since at court Eritrea stood above all for the coast outlet. His capital was Debarua, where there still stands a miserable village on the high road from Asmara to Adı Ugri. His neighbour in the Tigray was the Tigray Makonnen, master or lord of the Tigray. The latter was the greater vassal of their master, the Tigray being at all times one of the main dominions of the Empire; but the Bahr Negash was not his subordinate, nor did Eritrean affairs or petitions pass through his hands. This rule may well have been broken in the case of an exceptionally strong or ambitious ruler in the Tigray, and no longer existed from the end of the seventeenth century. Meanwhile, it reflects the different orientation and interest of the northern territory, of which the governorship was honourable and envied.

The writ of the Bahr Negash ran over the whole highlands—Hamasien, Akkele Guzai, Sarac—and fairly regularly perhaps among the nearer Keren communities. Farther north and west, or in the Baria-Kunama enclave, government was not attempted.

An occasional raid—frankly for slaves and cattle, or alleged as tribute collection—was the limit of State activity. In the Samhar control was on similar lines; in Dankali territory there was none. Over Massawa and Harkiko, the Bahr Negash never ceased to claim the royal authority, but enforcement of it in so alien an atmosphere, on folk suspicious or contemptuous of the highland Christians, must have been partial and occasional. It was soon to be still less.

## V

### THE STRUGGLES WITH ISLAM

#### 1. *Turks and Missionaries*

THE appearance of the Portuguese in the Red Sea has been already mentioned. Their ambitions, other than missionary, were confined to the occupation and fortification of seaports, in the manner of d'Albuquerque in the Persian Gulf; and had that grim admiral not died in 1515, Massawa might well have been thus acquired.

Yet they had no monopoly of local sea power. The Turks, now under the savage conqueror Selim I, had begun at the same moment a great movement of expansion. They had slain the Mamluk Sultan in 1516, entered Cairo in the year following, and within a few months sent forward their fleets into the Red Sea. Suakin and Massawa were occupied.

There followed years of savage sea warfare between Turk and Portuguese, well matched in brutality and the fanaticism of their Faiths. Of these struggles the townsmen of Massawa and Harkiko were constant witnesses. The Turkish occupation was, it would appear, occasional and confined to the island, the garrison feeble or corrupt. It did not prevent the landing of the Alvarez mission in 1520, and the immediate conversion of the local mosque into a church. It did not hinder the landing of the Portuguese musketeers in 1541, the cutting by them of every Muslim throat in the town, and the posting of a platoon of footmen at the port to safeguard communications. It was a government entrusted largely to the *Naib*—that is, deputy—the head of the local Belu family whose influence in the Samhar was predominant, as it was paramount in their own Harkiko. To the Naib were entrusted all mainland affairs, and he in turn was forced to keep on terms with the Bahr Negash. With so light a hold—if hold at all—were the Turks satisfied for forty years; yet elsewhere, at the same period, their armies

were conquering to east and west, the terror of Europe and the Levant.

Before and after the Turkish landing, the beaches of Massawa and the tracks from the coast to Halai and Debarua witnessed many a significant caravan. The mission of 1520 was met at the port firstly by the Naib, then by a deputation of Bizen monks, finally by the Bahr Negash. Dori, holder of this appointment, was brother of Naod Moghessa, mother of the Negus—sure sign that the post was honorific and lucrative. The missionaries included a doctor, painter, organist, scribe, and others. Their first stop, at Bizen, proved a failure through illness and discomfort; their second, at Debarua, was uneasy with the counter-intrigues of Dori. They left Eritrea six years later, also from Massawa.

The next important mission, that of Oviedo in 1557, landed at Harkiko at the moment when the Turks were preparing a bold stroke, later to be described. Oviedo's failure did not prevent the gradual gathering of a considerable Catholic community in Ethiopia, of whom Portuguese veterans and their children formed the nucleus. Such was found by Father Paez in 1603, when entry to the country was already difficult, and called even for disguise; de Silva in 1597 entered as an Indian fakir, Mendez in 1625 with a large party used the tiny Dankali coast-village of Beilul and traversed the burning plains in twenty-one days of march. In the sixteen-thirties, the royal order for the expulsion of all Catholic missionaries was enforced, and a great persecution began. One party, seeking to avoid expulsion, accepted the offered protection of the Bahr Negash, Yohannes Akay, then effectively independent of the Negus Fasil. Defying his master, the Eritrean governor yet handed—or sold—the fugitive priests to the Pasha of Massawa, who embarked them for Suakin. Others of the Fathers were discovered in hiding and put to death. A few would-be successors tried again and again to enter Ethiopia: some were seized and beheaded on landing, of two more the disguise was penetrated by men of the Bahr Negash (Theodore, kinsman of Akay). They

were discovered, and sent to the royal court at Gondar to be hanged.

On the side of doctrine, the Bahr Negash and his subjects took little interest in these strangers, or in their relations with the King of Kings. They shared, however, in the arrogant suspiciousness of their race, hoped for largesse as the Negus and his governors hoped for gifts of fire-arms, and repeated stories of the malignity and impiety of the Whites. The traffic through Eritrea was typical of the role of the territory as the great Ethiopian doorway - a use which made Eritrea less remote from the outside world than the farther hinterland. That the same doorway was used generally for gun-running and the Arabian slave-trade is certain.

## 2. *The Great Invasion*

The invasion and conquest of Eritrea by the Muslim forces of the Imam of Harrar, Ahmad bin Ibrahim, surnamed Gran, the Left-Handed, was but one episode of the long and pitiless war between that ruler and the Ethiopian empire. But no events throughout its history were more grave or disastrous.

The slow growth of Muslim power—growth of numbers, of formidable arms and ambitions—on the Somali south-eastern fringes of the Ethiopian massif, and the inevitability of a clash between it and the King of Kings, belong to the general history of Islam. Among the last aggressions by Muslims against a Christian country, it appeared certain to succeed. The more is considered the impetus of Faith, of valour, and the economic urge behind it, and the weakness both political and material of the Christian empire, the more surprising appears its final result in failure. The philosophic historian may well be struck by the narrow margin, the caprice of events, by which this result emerged; the military expert will analyse the weaknesses of the aggressor which in fact explain it. And the objective student of civilization will perhaps wonder whether this unexpected rescue of Ethiopia from Islam, so contrary to probability and to the main trend of history, was ultimately to its advantage.

The forces of the Imam, before they appeared to threaten the Tigray or Eritrea, had already occupied the central and southern parts of the Empire. A series of resounding victories had opened to his arms the whole territory south of the Abbai and the Awash. By 1532 the provinces of Tigray, Beghemeder, and Gojjam alone remained in the power of the emperor, Lebna Dengel. Elsewhere, fire and sword had destroyed church and garrison alike, tribute had been levied on the conquered, conversions to Islam in tens of thousands had been declared. All signs of a permanent conquest and settlement were present. It remained to occupy the remaining territories, to defeat the last armies of the emperor, and to secure his person.

The alarm created in Eritrea and the Tigray by these appalling events may be imagined. Tales were told, all too truly, of Muslim columns, under captains or kinsmen of the Imam, penetrating to each outlying area and sparing nothing. Treachery by Ethiopians had not been infrequent. The virile rapidity of the Islamic commander was already a legend. The Negus had a dozen times escaped as by a miracle. Only in instant surrender and conversion, it seemed, could there be safety.

The Bahr Negash was loyal, and with him a majority of the Eritrean highlanders. One eminent leader—Tesfa Lebul, holding some post in the Sarae—had, however, a traitor brother Theodore, who had collected a following prepared to welcome the invaders; nor, probably, was he unique. The Muslim elements, on both eastern and western fringes, were bound to side with a co-religionist, and even among the Christians every district had its malcontent or pretender.

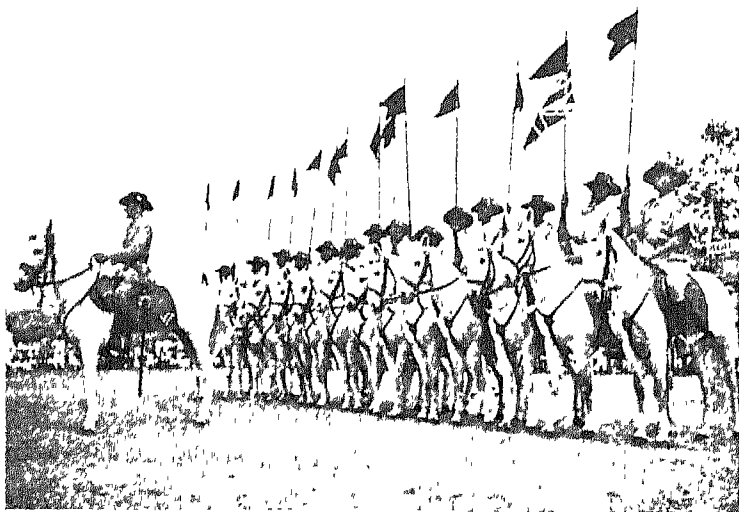
All efforts of the royal forces, fragmented but not yet demoralized, failed to stop the Imam's advance and occupation first of the Wollo district, then of the southern and then of the eastern Tigray. The new campaign, which began in March 1533, was marked by the same rapid marches and countermarches, capture of strongholds, stratagems and attacks, as the previous, but the conquest was less complete. Never in fact, in the Tigray or in Eritrea were settled conditions realized under the new rule.

Guerrilla war never ceased, though it never succeeded. More than 10,000 Tigraeans, it was said, laid down their lives. Prisoners, without exception, were beheaded. The emperor, again, escaped barely with his life.

A second campaign in the Tigray, in 1534, met equal resistance; but this time, in spite of the 'scorched earth' tactics of the defenders, the Muslim advance was pressed into Eritrea. A column, led by Wazir Abbas, nephew of the Imam, entered the Sarae and rallied the support of the traitorous Theodore. Tesfa Lehul manœuvred with skill and courage. He ambushed and slew his brother, outwitted and routed the Muslim force, and sent the severed head of a commander, Wazir Addole, as a gift to his Negus. All, however, was in vain; reinforcements reached the scene, Tesfa Lehul was overwhelmed and lost the next battle and his life. The Sarae was conquered and compelled to pay tribute. A brother of Theodore was placed in charge, while, still under the high command of Abbas, Afra, a Christian renegade, was appointed Bahr Negash. No resistance was met in the Hamasien nor in Akkele Guzai. The new Bahr Negash lorded it—but precariously—from the Gash to Massawa.

In the Tigray guerrilla fighting went on. Some areas remained unsubdued, the Negus uncaptured. The spirits and health of the Muslim armies suffered, desertions began. And when the main army moved into Beghemeder, rebellious disorder in the Tigray redoubled. Nevertheless, by the rainy season of 1535, no main resistance, no refusal of tribute-paying, remained save in the Gojjam province. This too was doomed. In 1536 Ethiopia was wholly conquered, save for small-scale local resistance or defiance, and the certainty of rebellion if the new hold were anywhere relaxed. In 1536 such a rebellion, in the Sarae itself, was instantly and bloodily suppressed.

But one chance remained—the Portuguese. The Negus's ambassador Bermudez had left for Rome in 1535; but the promised musketeers failed to appear until 1541, a delay which almost proved fatal. The small force still guarding the royal person could by now hardly be supported. Misery and want



*The Eritrean Police, a Guard of Honour at Adi Caich, October 1944*



*Opening of a new village school at Merrara - notables and villagers*





stalked the land. Many leaders ranged themselves openly with the Imam. The gallant heir to the throne, Victor, was killed in action. The Negus barely escaped death at a river crossing. His personal baggage was captured, his royal treasure of Amba Geshem was found and seized. He died, broken in spirit and body, in September 1540.

But Claudius, his surviving heir, infused new life into the resistance. In spite of further trials and dangers, he and it survived until the tremendous news of the Portuguese landing at Massawa—four hundred trained men with excellent arms, artillery, and followers—transformed the situation. A score of wavering or renegade leaders at once rejoined the imperial cause. The guerrilla forces of the Bahr Negash, and the royal bodyguard itself, trebled in a few days. Revolt everywhere raised its head.

The Portuguese admiral, Stefano di Gama (son of Vasco), appointed Christopher his brother to the land command. The latter, eluding the Turks or the Naib at Harkiko, landed and climbed to Debarua. There followed study of the terrain, and skirmishing for position; di Gama's Europeans were joined by eager forces from Hamasien and the Tigrai. The dowager queen, Sable Wangel, accompanied him as guide and counsellor. The first engagement, fought on Eritrean soil at Anasa in the Akkele Guzai, went well for the Portuguese; the next, in August 1542, cost di Gama his life and a great part of his force.

But the Imam, it seemed, had lost his genius for success. He failed to follow up this important victory; he even alienated by parsimony his newly imported mercenary force of Turks, Albanians, and Arabs. And his enemies were burning for revenge. By a supreme effort the young Negus effected a junction of his forces with his allies, and by rapid offensive strokes inspired the confidence of revenge and triumph.

The final battle took place in the hilly country of Beghemeder. It was decided, not by numbers nor even by valour, but by the death in action of the Imam himself. The Muslim forces dispersed, retreated, disappeared. The Empire was restored to its

old rulers. The monarchy and the Church had triumphed. Islamic converts recanted, local resistance was soon overcome, loyal governors reinstated.

Weakened and impoverished, but saved and alive, the Empire stood.

### 3. *The Turkish attempt at Conquest*

The Turks or their representatives at Massawa had taken no part in the Imam's campaign; and when this failed, their abandonment of the seaboard might have been expected. The result was otherwise. The coast was still Muslim throughout the Red Sea; Suakin, Jedda, Zeila were their strongholds; no Ethiopian move against the Naib of Harkiko had been made. And the Ottoman State was everywhere at the height of its aggressive power.

Far from withdrawing, less than twenty years from the defeat of Gran the Turks increased, by a sudden fresh landing and strengthened garrison, their hold on Eritrea. At the moment of arrival of Oviedo's mission (1557) they crossed the plain from Harkiko, scaled the eastern slope, and seized the imperial outpost of Debarua, capital of the Bahr Negash. This action, and the patrols of their light columns, gave them the plateau. Debarua was urgently fortified, to act as centre and treasure-house.

Eritrea was in consternation. It spread to the Negus's court, where prophets of evil were not lacking to foretell his ruin at the hands of this new and terrible invader.

On the western fringes, the Beja tribes of the Barka valley were soon in touch with the new Muslim ruler, and encouraged to raid the emperor's helpless frontiers. Within a few weeks they were pillaging Ethiopia beyond the Takazzé river, joined by the lowland tribesmen of the Gash delta and the Baria fringes. Among these were Beja sections from Mazaga who had, since a visit of Gran's officers to their homes a quarter-century before, thrown off the last shadow of allegiance to the Negus. Their present leader or matriarch was Gaina, sister of the previous shaikh.

The king's troops rallied. They could not prevent the Turks from invading the Tigrai district of Agamé and violating the sanctuary of Debra Dammo, venerable as a last refuge of the dying Lebna Dengel; but they met and defeated an enemy force near the base of the Buri peninsula, then moved against the tribesmen in the west.

Gaina was early in touch with Yuzdemir Pasha, the Turkish leader, visited him at Debarua and promised her treasures, concealed in the desert, as a war chest. But his force was, after all, too small, his tribal allies of little value. Isaak, the royal general, acted with speed and vigour. He defeated and slew the nephew of the tribal queen, organized loyal revolt throughout the territory, surrounded Debarua with his levies. The Pasha, by a forced march, seized the promised treasure; but his men and animals, decimated by fever and the lowland sun, barely crept back to Debarua, there to face siege by Eritrean forces. An escape-party by night was captured, Gaina herself a prisoner, her treasures looted. Debarua fell. The Turkish garrison sought escape to the coast, but were in large part destroyed. Yuzdemir fled to Suakin. The Turks held nothing, save Massawa and Harkiko, of their conquests. The tribes of Mazaga submitted.

Three years later, in a day of general revolt against the severities of the Negus Minas, the attempt was renewed. Isaak, gallant leader in 1557 and later appointed Bahr Negash, was now to play the part of rebel and kingmaker. Like many another outlying governor, he had achieved virtual independence, and now sought to regularize it by a change of monarch. He proclaimed as King of Kings one Tazkaro, a natural son of Minas's brother.

The king dispatched against him a veteran general, Zara Yohannes. Isaak defeated him and advanced against the sovereign, at whose court he was not without supporters; these, it was said, included the Queen Mother herself, the Catholic element, and the Portuguese. But Minas moved vigorously against Tazkaro, overcame and captured him, and saw him hurled from the rocks of Lamalmon.

Isaak, undaunted, proclaimed Basil, brother of Tazkaro, as Negus, and—strange reversal of fortune—hurried to the presence of Yuzdemir Pasha in Massawa. In exchange for alliance he offered the whole Eritrean province. Other and yet stranger allies accrued: the Patriarch Oviedo, after braving the jealous fury of the Negus and almost achieving martyrdom, escaped from court to the camp of Isaak and the Turk. He was warmly received. The Bahir Negash offered lightly to accept the Catholic faith; the Portuguese fathers spoke of the support of all their country's sea forces.

The Negus acted rapidly. His forces engaged the rebels in April 1562, and defeated them—but doubtfully—in a battle costly to both sides. Minas himself withdrew, and launched a column against the Doba of Akkele Guzai, notorious Saho raiders and malcontents. It was his last act. He contracted fever in the lowlands of the Saho country, and died within a few days. In Eritrea the domination of the Turkish Pasha continued for nearly twenty years, with Isaak in open revolt against his sovereign.

The successor of Minas, Malak Sagad, was one of the greater monarchs of his dynasty. He lost no time in restoring the sinking fortunes of his empire, which had been left in confusion by the follies of his predecessor, by the Galla invasions, and by wholesale rebellion of vassals in every quarter. By 1577, the great provinces of the central empire having been reduced to order, it was the turn of the Mareb Mellash to feel his hand.

Malak Sagad had feigned friendship and indulgence towards Isaak until he could deal with him. But the Bahr Negash was not deceived; he saw his fate approaching, and a flattering embassy from the Negus did not reassure him. He replied evasively, and tightened his compact with the Pasha of Debarua and Massawa, and with the Muslim kingdom of Harrar.

The last mentioned was the next objective of the Negus. He was wholly successful. The conquest and suppression of the Harrar sultanate by Ethiopian armies (which does not belong to the present history) left the restoration of his authority in

Eritrea as the king's next concern. Messengers from the highlands, including a fierce fanatic monk Abba Neway, urged him to hasten their deliverance from the Muslim. Delayed by one more campaign in the south, Malak Sagad in 1578 moved at long last towards the Tigrai.

The way of diplomacy was tried first, with the purpose of detaching Isaak from his Turkish ally. The envoys of the Negus found the rebel at Debarua. His reply to his overlord was insulting: 'I have made peace and friendship with the Pasha, seated upon the self-same carpet!' With the letter he sent a cannon-ball, symbol of armed defiance. The Negus took up the challenge.

His near approach led to many desertions from the camp of the Bahi Negash. Isaak fell back from the line of the Belesa river to the stronghold of Debarua and Turkish support. The people of the Sarae turned against him. In the first brush in November 1578 Turkish arms routed the king's troops, and advanced with artillery against his camp. The Negus, almost overwhelmed, was barely able to throw Galla cavalry into the fight, capture the guns, and turn the fortunes of the day.

Isaak lost heart and asked for terms of peace. The Negus bade him abandon his infidel friends and combine against them. He countered by proposing a joint understanding with the Pasha; but while messages passed to and fro, desertions from his forces continued. Skirmish and raid went on, until, their supplies restored by wholesale raiding of the country-side, the royal forces could again take the offensive, attack and crush the joint forces of their enemy. Isaak and the Pasha were both killed. The Negus, placing with grim humour their severed heads 'upon the self-same carpet', showed them to Isaak's followers before putting these, in their turn, to death.

The rebellion of Eritrea, with its twenty years of rule by Turkish arms, was at an end. But the habit of revolt was strong, and the King of Kings had little time to restore his authority. Ten years later (1589) a lesser chief Walda Ezum raised the standard of rebellion, made terms once again with the

complacent Pasha, and withstood the first troops sent against him. The Turks occupied Debarua and bloodily defeated the Tigrai Makonnen, Dahragot. The emperor himself advanced through the Shiré province towards the Mareb. Turkish troops who had crossed it southwards were destroyed, in an encounter which became famous, by a young hero Akuba Mikael.

The Pasha retired hastily to his defended base at Harkiko. His forces were there besieged and attacked, but resisted successfully behind their trenches. All efforts of the king to drive the Turks finally from his soil were unavailing. He retired to the highlands, where his troops pitilessly looted the peaceful villagers. 'Better be pillaged by Christians than by Turks!' was all his reply to their protests.

Walda Ezum fled. His family was captured and insulted, himself caught and beheaded. At Debarua the Negus found rich presents from the Pasha awaiting him. He accepted them and consented to make peace. The Turks remained for three centuries more on the Eritrean coast, which was never again to obey an Ethiopian ruler.

## VI

### EVOLUTION OF ERITREAN SOCIETY

#### 1. *From Enda to District*

THE great events of the middle sixteenth century led to a more rapid evolution of society in Eritrea. Already the agricultural clan-settlements had fixed their residence, definite land rights had been established. Land shortage was still no present but a future evil, for areas on the northern and eastward brow of the plateau were still untenanted. Elsewhere, boundaries of the enda lands were laid down, grazing lands marked off, and claim laid to the best well sites and forest strips. A static agricultural society was being built.

Moreover, the social structure itself was being modified. Not only the ruin of the Tigray country-side by Gran's bloody occupation, but the mass invasions of the Galla tribes farther south, had broken up or ruined age-long communities and forced great numbers in central Ethiopia to seek new homes. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of such families entered the highlands of Eritrea. Some were content to be allotted empty land by the Bahr Negash, and make the best terms they could with their new neighbours. Others, in stronger force or higher pretension, seem to have taken a share—perhaps the lion's—of existing cultivation, and entered rather as masters than as refugees. Certain it is that in this age the main stock of future landholders was formed, and immigrants from the south were prominent in it. The days of the 'landless folk' of later Eritrea were not yet; but the imposition of so many immigrants reduced the land surplus still unused, made it for the first time an object of counter-claim and jealousy, and led to the concentration of large village settlements no longer confined to a single enda. The social caste of Elders, hitherto composed of primitive family-heads or such earlier immigrants as the sons and grandsons of Meroni, was increased now by many a family from the Tigray



or beyond, while others of the earlier stocks dropped into obscurity.

Meanwhile new, untraditional forms of land tenure were introduced. The part played by the Coptic clergy in the resistance to Islam was rewarded by the King of Kings in privileges which included important land grants, bestowed in freehold or fief. And such fiefs were given (never as widely in Eritrea as in southern Ethiopia) to others than the Church—to royal favourites or officials. To these was due the emergence, for many a cultivator, of a new relationship with the land, that of mere tenant or cultivator for another; and of a new type of local notable, the fief-holder. Both were conceptions new to the early and democratic *enda* with its freehold land. Simultaneous, too, was the growth of administrative power over neighbours, in the hands of individuals emerging from the mass of private or group landholders. The events of the sixteenth century had brought the monarchy, and all the patronage and privilege within its gift, closer to far-off Eritrea; military garrisons appeared more regularly, lands were allotted to them, more royal officials were seen at work—tax-farmers and lieutenants of the Bahr Negash—and their favour sought by local aspirants to greatness.

That this process of—in a certain sense—modernization had gone far by the end of the sixteenth century, and would soon go farther again, is shown by the later history of the Meroni house. Numbers of its members had by now, with their own families, left the original village of their first settlement, and founded new communities or become dominant in the old. Bitter faction between them was the rule. The succession was often disputed, and even offshoots which created new and dominant clans in other districts lived in no permanent peace with the parent stock. This was the more serious since, with the supersession, as unit of residence, of the single *enda* by the village, and the village increasingly merging in the district (itself based as a unit on the common ancestry of the *enda* heads), a field for the rise of local rulers was in sight, and required only the sanction of the central power. By the middle of the seventeenth century a class

had in fact arisen capable of claiming the rule of whole districts and representing the Negus in them and, by the end of the eighteenth, almost a hereditary principality of the Eritrean highlands

An outstanding example of this process was the career of Tesfazian. Eldest son of Ateshum, who had carved out his own independence from the parent clan, Tesfazian by personality and ambition went yet farther afield. He claimed the rule of the whole Hamasien, and in the early or middle years of the seventeenth century was invested with it (it is said) by the King of Kings himself, Susenyos, a tremendous step already from the primitive democratic Eritrea of two centuries earlier. The possibility of such a position could not be unique: other claims, based on the loyalty of other districts, were soon advanced. In land tenure and in personal relations the enda was still all-important; but in local government much larger units had come to stay. Meanwhile, Tesfazian, with title and investiture, ruled half the plateau, and took thought for his succession.

His two marriages had produced two sons of each wife. He retained in his own village of Ad-Dzega (or Hazzega, as it became) the eldest son of each, and sent the younger to Saad-Dzega (or Zazzega). His hope was for peace and unity; but this was not to be. For two centuries the strife of the two factions disturbed the Hamasien, and claims of precedence gave place to an armed and rancorous hatred. Success in general attended the village of the younger sons, who added, at fortunate times, districts of Akkele Guzai to their dominions, and even regions in Wolkait across the Setit. At times their government was disturbed by successes of the rival, but these were shortlived and unpopular. The ruler of the time bore the Ethiopian title of Cantibai, which later became Dejjach.

Less than a century after the rise of Tesfazian, first self-made viceroy of Hamasien, a further step in greatness (the legend says) was made by his descendants. The direct succession had failed, and the new Cantibai was of a junior branch. An obscure member of the older line, by name Habsullus, found this

intolerable. He had dreamed a dream—that the drums of high office were sounding in his own honour; and his decision was made to seek his fortune at the court of Gondar. Here he betook himself, but remained, neglected because empty-handed, among the outer rabble.

But the visit was not unheeded by his unjustly powerful kinsman at Zazzega. This usurper feared some sinister issue from it, and sent his own son to Gondar to ensure its failure by the most certain means. Emmaha, the son, found his opportunity; slyly, he gave the Negus the name of his poor relation as of one capable of mastering a bucking colt which all had failed to ride. He counted on Habsullus's ignominious failure; but he brilliantly succeeded, gained the royal favour, and next achieved in the king's service a mission made more perilous by the wiles (which failed again) of the malignant cousin. Habsullus became a royal counsellor, and later secured the government of an area greater than Mareb Mellash itself. The proud title of *Abieto*, prince, and the hand of the Negus's own daughter were his final proofs of imperial favour.

But there was tragedy ahead. Habsullus and his bride started their journey towards his province. At night, in his wayside tent, he sought his lawful rights as husband, only to be repulsed with scorn. Servants rushed in to guard their mistress; it was dark; and Habsullus's sword laid low, by tragic error, his proud princess. Horror-struck, he disdained to flee, and returned to Gondar to throw himself on the royal mercy. The Negus forgave, but reduced his title from *Abieto* to *Dejjach*, and his government to that only of the Mareb Mellash. His rule and that of Gebracristos his son were long famed as a Golden Age which bequeathed, among other blessings, a written law-code long held in veneration and use. Gebracristos was given a daughter of the royal house in marriage, and every stopping-place on his bridal journey was bestowed on the bride as her fief for ever.

Of this agreeable story, a part is true and illustrative. Direct relations with the Negus, however infrequent, were possible

after the move of the Solomonids to Gondar in 1660. The emergence of local candidates to rule even as Bahr Negash was but the culmination of the long-drawn evolution above suggested. The granting of hierarchic titles to Eritreans dates in fact from the early seventeenth century. The codification of customary law had by then well begun, and was doubtless the work of outstanding men. Finally, the grant of fiefs (which survived until Italian times) had become a feature of administration and of the land. So much content of history has the saga of Ilabsullus. The oral records of the highlands contain many of the type.

To an earlier period—the latter part of the sixteenth century—probably belongs the *Fatha Negast*, or Laws of the King. It was a civil code, compiled three centuries earlier by a learned ecclesiastic in Alexandria, and translated long afterwards into Ge'ez. Although inept to its function as a guide and text-book for Ethiopian judges—being ill codified and ill translated, as well as intended for a quite different public—it was so adopted, and for three centuries it retained a unique influence on the conception of law and morality in Ethiopia and the Mareb Mellash.

## 2. *The Coast and the Port*

The convulsions of Muslim coast society farther south, in Gran's Somali principality, had their effects in the Dankali country of Eritrea. Neither the moment nor the precise occasion can now be known, but somehow the upward surge of the Somali tribesmen, with the almost simultaneous Galla migration, had produced some clash or pressure which forced many to seek new pastures. From the south-east came bodies of other Danakil of common origin with, but long separated from, the 'White Men' of Eritrean Dankalia, with differences of dialect and a strain of Somali blood. Legend, as usual, is ready with its story; but to the bare fact little can be safely added. The element now entering the coast strip was known as the 'Red Men', and rather by force than numbers—and, they would add, thanks

to higher lineage— was able to impose itself as a superior breed. When the Danakil came first, long years later, to be studied by outside observers, they were found to include the white men (Ado Iammara or Adoimara) as the inferior, and the red men (Assa Iammara or Assaimara) as the superior stratum. The former outnumbered their aristocrats by some four to one. But the distinction, which has never been questioned, does not in any way determine the tribal grouping. This is such that both elements are included in many of the sections, while others are wholly of the Adoimara. Some minor groups (or the upper stratum in them) are of clearly alien origin—Arab or Somali. The Danakil have, indeed, little present claim to purity of stock; their unity is one of common language, faith, and conditions.

The assumption of their present privileges—that, above all, of title to grazing areas, where the 'white men' can be but tributary tenants—was no doubt for the Assaimara a gradual process, begun on their arrival in the territory at this period. The present allegiance of the whole group—a vague and in no way practical allegiance—to the Sultan of Aussa dates presumably from the move of the Sultan's forebears from Harrar to Aussa in the last quarter of the sixteenth century.

Dankali participation in the conquests of the Left-Handed was considerable, but these were not the Danakil of Eritrea; they were rather the ancestors of the 'red men' in their former homes, or of others who are to-day Ethiopian subjects. The present international boundary leaves a part of the Dankali nation in Eritrea, part in Ethiopia, and part in French Somaliland.

Since the formation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of Dankali society, as described above, the coastal strip with its fierce, inhospitable people has had no history. The little village ports of Edd, Thio, Beilul, Assab have played their part in running contraband—salt and slaves outwards, guns and merchandise to the hinterland. They have looked to Massawa and the highlands or to the Yemen for the grain which their own deserts do not afford; and all alike have endured cruel raids from

over the escarpment, from which no government has protected them. A traveller in the mid-seventeenth century found them not to be tributary to Ethiopia.

The sixteenth to eighteenth centuries witnessed we know not what contraction or admixture in the Saho group. The evidence of to-day suggests that, on the fringes of their tribal area, some Saho families merged in the Tigré-speaking tribes of the Samhar, others in the Danakil, while the Saho language was, on the contrary, adopted by near-by tribal fragments previously Tigré or Afur-speaking. This would in principle explain the presence in the group to-day of tribes reputed 'pure' Saho stock, and others of Saho loyalty, habit, and language but of origin confessedly extraneous. The legend that the whole group was formerly Christian can contain no truth; the church ruins (if such they are) which they show to-day may represent those which belonged to Copts of the highlands into whose lands they spread—as they are spreading still.

It is of interest but no enlightenment that both their legend and that of the Mensa and Marea tribes of Keren district speak of an ancestor common to them all—Zaid, an Arab of the Hijaz. There may indeed be an element of unity in some fraction which, at some period, was added to all these stocks, but in general the Zaid story rather creates a new problem than explains an old. The true Saho history, it is evident, does not include the usual feature of conquest by stronger late-comers; there is among them no trace of serf and master caste, and even the present tribal organization with heads of sections and subsections is recent and largely artificial. This distinguishes them from the Sahil tribes, shortly to be described. The group extends into the Irob district of modern Ethiopia, with a narrow prolongation down the escarpment.

Of the Samhar tribes in this period there is little to be said. They never united to form important units, and this for sufficient reasons: firstly, the poverty of their country kept them scanty and scattered; secondly, the winter seasonal descent of the highland graziers, stronger than themselves, kept their

pretensions humble; thirdly, such grouping or control as they required was supplied by the Naibs of Harkiko. Reference has been made on earlier pages to the Belu origins of this family and its settlement in force at Harkiko. Here and throughout the Samhar the Naibs were, for at least three centuries and a half, the chief political force.

The family itself split in the sixteenth century into two rival factions, one (the Bait Ilasan) at Harkiko, the other (Bait 'Uthman) occupying the inland villages of Otumlo and Monkullo. The official post of *Naib*—deputy or agent to the Turks—was held by each branch in turn, with such regularity as the power of intrigue or force, or Turkish venality, would permit. And it was no sinecure. Tact and firmness were needed to meet the claims of the Turkish Agha or Pasha, and his ragamuffin Janissary garrison, always without offending too dangerously the Bahr Negash with his claim to overlordship of all the mainland. The working rule was to divide the Customs takings (of which the Naib was sole collector) into two parts—one for each of the powers between whom he was the uneasy buffer; but both probability and the evidence of travellers show that as his collections would vary with the weakness of the payer, so would his payment to his masters vary with the respect with which, from time to time, he might regard them. He could make further profits from his contract to supply Massawa with drinking-water from the mainland, and from exactions from passing travellers and their caravans.

Of the Naib's diplomacy during the Muslim wars of 1530-42, or in the Turkish attempts at land conquest of 1557-89, nothing is recorded. If individuals sometimes fell to ruin between the two stools, the dynasty itself went on; and necessarily so, because such an authority with double loyalty (or disloyalty) and double status had a real and practical value, as long as the Turks held their foothold on alien soil.

But the Naib was no mere tax-gatherer. His was the dominant power in the Samhar. Whether in the name of the Bahr Negash or in his own, he was the settler of disputes, the allotter of

grazing areas, the redresser of wrongs throughout the wide coastal area of Saho and Samhar tribesmen. His services to the ruler of Tigrai and the Ethiopian power were rewarded by fiefs bestowed in the highlands on him or on his kinsmen, there to become centres of his influence and religion. And, all regardless of his highland masters, his agents ranged far and wide among the Sahil herdsmen inland, collecting the tribute which he could claim in his periods of ascendancy, and spreading the faith of the Prophet among half-hearted Christians.

One episode is recorded which links the petty politics of the Samhar to those of the Ethiopian court. The King of Kings had, for decades or centuries past, used the Massawa port for the dispatch to foreign markets of great consignments of the merchandise brought to him by way of tribute, and for the import of foreign wares. Under Yasu the Great (1682-1706) the royal agent for this service was an Egyptian-Armenian, Murad, who enjoyed his high confidence. This had not prevented the Naib of the time—Musa bin 'Umr of the Harkiko house—demanding full customs-dues on the imperial imports, and seizing them in default of payment. The year was 1690. The emperor replied by an inland blockade of Massawa. All imports ceased, the position was intolerable. But the same prudent realism which kept the Naibs in power for centuries, now served them again. The Negus was at Axum, his columns had already been active in Eritrea. Musa played his only card—complete submission. He arrived with all humility at Axum, craved the imperial pardon and mercy, and paid over the confiscated goods with heavy increase. Normal relations were restored, and Murad resumed the royal trading.

The social effects of the Turkish presence at Massawa were interesting. It led to visits of the Naib family to Jedda and Suakin, by Turkish officers to Debarua. It led to the flight of an occasional Turkish deserter or adventurer to the highlands, never to return. Other native families besides the Naib's obtained hereditary posts in the Turkish service, or arising out of the Naib's own office. Such, a century after their first coming,



was the leadership of the rabble of threadbare soldiers who lounged at the Pasha's or Naib's doorway—and who, themselves Janissaries of Turkish or Georgian blood by origin, had merged by successive half-bred generations into the local population, and from a regiment had become a clan or tribe: an instance, in the small world of Massawa, of the descent of the proud conquering Turk of the sixteenth century into the backward and shabby idler of the long Ottoman decline.

To this element of Turkish origin and to the basic Samhar stock were added in succeeding centuries, in the villages suburban to Massawa, various contingents left behind from the yearly traffic to the Mecca pilgrimage, and others brought by the normal movements of a port. Arabs from the Yemen and Hadhramaut, Danakil from the coast near by and Somalis from the Horn of Africa, Sudanis from Suakin and the Nile valley, negroes from Mombasa and Zanzibar, Galla slaves, bequeathed their blood to the population which is called Eritrean to-day.

### 3. *Keren and the Sahil*

The dislocation and movement of families, as we have seen them operative in the highlands in the slow creation of a new social world, were busy also in the hills of Keren and the Sahil. From the unorganized pastoral folk of the fourteenth century were being fashioned the tribes familiar in modern Eritrea. Again dates and precise sequences are lacking, and legend as ever over-simplifies; but the essential course—or at least result—of events is clear.

The outstanding event of the sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries in the Keren world was a new invasion by a compact and numerous body from the heart of the Amhara country. They had been displaced, one can safely guess, by some movement following the Muslim wars or the emperor's reprisals, and they sought new lands in a region farther from storm centres. They were agricultural people, organized only in their kinship groups, and speaking the Bilein language—classed as one of an unsemitized Agau group. Expelling the last Baria villagers from

the broad valleys of the Keren hill country, or occupying those already possessed by the half-Ethiopian folk, the Bilein community—who used for themselves the name of Boasgor or Bogos—settled and adopted as their serfs the earlier occupants and such others as joined them for protection or a living. They kept, for two centuries more, the Christian faith which they had long professed, and taught their new subjects the ways of highland agriculture.

The Bilein people of to-day consist of two groups, outwardly indistinguishable but of diverse origin. One, the Bait Tarké, seems to represent the community we have just described. The other, the Bait Taukwé, represents a separate immigration by a dominant element either native to the Hamasien or having travelled slowly through it from an original Amhara home. The latter is far more probable, because the Bait Taukwé speak Bilein, and mere nearness to the Bait Tarké would hardly have led to this; indeed, the preservation of their original tongue by either group, and its imposition on a Tigré-speaking serf class, is contrary to the experience of other minorities in the Sahil or on the plateau.

Within each of the Bilein groups, the evolution of their modern units began, always upon a basis of kinship among the ruling caste, and a clear distinction from the serfs. The pedigrees which by legend explain the present clans are of little value, but the race and family consciousness which they embody is still dominant.

Elsewhere in the Keren district, the same period saw the beginnings of modern Eritrea. They are here attributed by story (as has been mentioned in the case of the Saho) to descendants of the noble Zaid. In fact, the process which we have watched in the highlands at the same stage—influx and settlement of strong and 'noble' families, with the creation of new social groups and loyalties while the earlier and weaker folk sank into serfdom—was repeated in the Keren mountains. The myth is of the brothers Mensái and Mareái who set out together, sought new homes in different regions, and left families of sons to found new

endas. Each longed, once before he died, to see the ancestral lands from which he sprang. Ignorant of the other's movements, each set out and arrived at nightfall at the old home. A sudden meeting, the apparition of a supposed enemy, a war-cry and the hurling of two lances conclude, with the death of both at the moment of tragic recognition, a story typical of a score of others. In fact, the later tribes of Mensa—split into two main groups and many sections—and the Marea, divided into Red and Black, show the same serf and master castes as the Dalein and lead the same life of quiet agriculture and grazing. The origin of the Red and Black is explained in legend as from the offspring of two wives of Mareái. The true meaning is long forgotten; nor can much be known of the many single families or endas which, from the Hamasien or from across the Mareb, have at some time joined the Marea or the Mensa groups and become heads of endas and in turn the ancestors of others. Both of the tribes were Christians, at least in the master caste, for two centuries after their formation; and both adopted the Tigré speech of their dependants.

In passing, the use of the word 'tribe' for these communities is more convenient than proper. If the tribes of the Arab world are taken as the norm, with their peculiar patriarchy among equals and singleness of loyalty based on tradition and the needs of life, then the 'tribes' of Keren and the Sahil have little claim to the term. Their economics are tribeless, their traditions essentially those of the family and enda, their claimed origins geographical and diverse; and the serf-master relationship is farther still from the essential democracy of the Arab. Yet the word can scarcely be avoided.

Similar events, in the same period, led to the establishment in the northern hills of the groups which are familiar in our own century. Of the tribe of Benjamin—the story goes—and the reputable clan of Zanadaglé that was sprung therefrom, there came, ages ago, a family from the Akkele Guzai northward to the Hamasien district of Carneshim. Here they remained and flourished until, three centuries ago, the sons of Beemnet or

Bumnet—clan leader of the time—fell into quarrels which distraught their house. The leadership fell to others from their weakened hands; and Asghedé, third of the sons, left home and settled with a few followers at Adi Nefas in the same district. But he was reserved for a greater destiny. His riding-mule one day, breaking from its picket, strayed from home northwards. His servants traced but could never recapture it; until, after leading them for days of march, the beast itself surrendered to them. The pleasant 'rora' or upland plain where this occurred was named thereafter Rora Bagla, the Mule's Highland, and thither came Asghedé soon afterwards, with all his men. He imposed his rule on the primitive herdsmen of the place and district, and the great group of the Bait Asghedé was founded. This typical folk-story tells in its own way—differing little from a score of Eritrean variants of the same theme—the familiar story of a stronger or more sophisticated stock entering, as overlords, the lands of a defenceless folk, accepting their submission, adopting their speech. The grandchildren of Asghedé gave each his name to a 'tribe' of the same race and country-side, providing thus the later units—Habab, Ad Tekles, Ad Temariam—with ancestors as authentic as many another. The quarrels and agreements among these, their raids and intermarriages, the precedence given to descendants of their trusted servants, their rare visits to the King of Kings and rewards of title and robe of honour, are the commonplaces of their tradition.

Certain it is that the superior element in these tribes named after Asghedé represents a true seventeenth-century invasion (peaceful perhaps) of the territory by fragments of Ethiopian stock from the Hamasien. The resulting serf-and-master relationship, already seen in the Marea-Mensa and the Bilein groups, is no different among the Habab to-day. This and its fellow tribes have, since their first formation—which so briefly to describe is to over-simplify—come to adopt the religion, equally with the language, of the weaker majority, for reasons later to be assigned. The districts which they occupy—the north-centre of the Eritrean triangle and the north-eastern coast—permit no

agriculture, and enforce instead an annual descent to the coastal pastures. It was among these tribes, as we have seen, that the Naib contrived, when he could, to spread his influence. That of the king and the Bahr Negash was never real; it sank to nothing as his impotence to rule or protect them grew more apparent, and the Ethiopian origins of the master caste faded into legend.

#### 4. *The West*

The history of the hapless Negroid enclave of the Kunama and Baria peoples was in this age, as in every other, one of oppression and ill-use.

They lacked neither courage nor intelligence; but the sense of belonging to a race apart, surrounded by alien ill-will better armed and organized, made them the common victims of all their neighbours. To Beja or Bani Amir raiding from the north, and light-hearted man-hunts from Amhara or Tigrai country beyond Setit, would be added invasion on a grander scale by the royal forces themselves. No rights were accorded to the unhappy pagans. Christian and Muslim alike claimed merit in despoiling and enslaving them. Counter-raids by the victims were not unknown, and earned them, indeed, a reputation for ferocity which lasted into Italian times; they were known to attack grazing parties on their northern borders and no traveller was safe along their marches; but, on balance, they were sinned against far more constantly, and owed to this their gradual shrinking from a situation, generations ago, of widespread dominance on the plateau to one of crushed constriction in their present homes.

In 1585 the forces of Malak Sagad, tired from expeditions against the Falasha and rebels in the wild Semien massif, were allowed 'as a reward' to invade Kunama territory. The attack was sudden and truculent, the terror of the Negro villagers such as to deprive them of all power to resist. The destruction and looting of their villages was completed by the seizure of slaves in hundreds, later to be rescued from their new homes by further payments in ransom.

Such scenes, on a less grandiose scale, were the commonplace of the Kunama country. They were repeated in 1692—and, the record tells, this time under royal leadership. Again the forces of the Negus had earned a holiday; and this time, it seems, the Baria and the Kunama had given offence by a raid on the Shiré province. A careful military operation was planned, with lightless night marches to ensure surprise. But there was no battle, there was mere one-sided slaughter—and this before the eyes of the most magnanimous of Ethiopian rulers, Yasu the Great, who with his own hand joined in the butchery. For once, this was not the end. When the royal force was in retirement southward from its next campaign—shortly to be described—the Baria and Kunama tribesmen harrassed successfully its movements, cut off its stragglers, and fired the long grass through which they waded.

In the Bani Amir group, the dualism of their origin and the inequality of their castes continued; centuries were required to give them such unity—never of blood or language—as they now possess. While some sections, ever forming and reforming round some fresh nucleus, inventing or adopting some new legend of origin, were assimilating elements from each other, and becoming in many cases bilingual in Tigré and To Bedawi, others retained unchanged (and still retain) their original character.

The sixteenth century saw great changes among the Bani Amir. They developed a new governing class, and gained a new powerful neighbour. The latter was the dynasty of the Fung, Nilotic negroes from the far south who adopted Islam and ruled an empire on the Middle Nile. Their centre was at Sennar, from which their captains and tax-gatherers soon pushed eastward into the Eritrean hills. The degree of Fung control of the other great (and by now half-formed) branches of the Beja race is doubtful; of the Bani Amir, it was little enough beyond formality—yet more than that of Ethiopia had ever been. Some exchange of visits and of presents, some remissions of fairly regular tribute, were the limit of it. Yet the overlordship was real. It involved if not the subjection at least the confirmation

in his office of the supreme Bani Amir chief—the Diglal, as he was entitled; the word itself, significantly, is of Fung origin. From Sennar, too, came the strange official three-cornered cap of office which the Diglal still wears to-day on occasions of ceremony.

The circumstances in which the Belu ruling caste gave place among the Bani Amir to another, are quite obscure. From the early years of the Fung dominion we find the Nabtab in their places. Who were these, and how did they climb to greatness? The legend runs that, in Belu days, a saintly wanderer came from the Nile to the Barka country. He gained a following, and married a woman of the Belu. Her kinsmen disdained the stranger, and slew him in their wrath. Her son grew up, discovered relics of his father, and from them traced his kinship with the great ones of the Sudan. These equipped him with arms and followers, to reclaim his rights and wreak his vengeance. This he did; the Belu murderers were overthrown, and under the name of Nabtab the descendants of the avenger took their high places in the tribe.

This story follows familiar lines, and brings little enlightenment. Another version suggests that Nabtab derives from the title 'Nebet' of the Fung tax-gatherers, and their authority in the tribe based on this later forgotten official post. But this also explains in no satisfactory way the ascent into power of a whole caste of aristocrats, found from then onwards in every Bani Amir section—Tigré and Beja-speaking alike—and superseding everywhere their Belu predecessors. The Nabtab, alone in Bani Amir society, properly claim a common (if mysterious) origin, and their place in all the sections has been a main unifying factor. Their relation to the commoners is that of the master caste in the Beit Asghedé or the Bilein—the commonest form, in fact, of social organization in western and northern Eritrea.

The Bani Amir confederacy had never admitted (even if it were claimed) the effective suzerainty of the Negus, and less than ever after the rise of the Fung power. Even to the Bahr Negash, the upper courses of the Barka, as of the Anseba, passed through unknown and forbidding territory.

Yet they were not wholly exempt from the rapacious barbarity which was Ethiopian 'government' on its frontier marches—the government of which the Kunama, like the Shankalla of the west, or the Sidama of the south, had too frequent knowledge. In 1692, year of the great raid on the Kunama, the Negus himself for the first time in all history led forces to the barren and broken steppe country of the Barka valley, still roadless to-day. The king's objectives were the cattle and the persons of the nomads; his method was the stoppage of wells. The ruler of the Tigray, Dejjach Claudius, adopted the same plan still farther north, and reported favourably on the water and pastures there. The king joined him, and ranged over the unvisited spaces of the Bani Amir. Slaves and cattle were driven off in many hundreds. The king returned.

The hatred and vengeance of the tribesmen, Bani Amir and Baria alike, found expression when the royal forces at last retired. The loyalty of a Jiberti (son of a Turk of the Massawa garrison) barely saved from assassins the life of the rear-guard commander, Fesa Kesos; but a massacre of the retiring detachments could not be prevented, and the Tigraeans of Claudius fought for their lives. Their commander ordered a general and rapid retreat, which barely saved the main body of his forces. Stragglers were cut off in scores, the baggage column and herds of captured animals were assailed and rescued. The campaign ended in ignominious disaster.

The King of Kings went hunting elephants in the Taka district, over the site of the future Kassala, then returned through Shiré to his own country.

Some further intervention in Bani Amir affairs was attempted, it would seem, four years later. The passage of power from the Belu overlords to their Nabtab successors was perhaps incomplete, or there was or had been a pretender to power against the Diglal appointed by the Fung emperor. The highest, or a high, authority of the Bani Amir (called by the Ethiopian chronicler 'the Emir') met in his own country a senior envoy of the Negus, one Baslé. The wealth of the desert lord—his flocks and herds



—aroused the cupidity of the Ethiopians. They urged their leader to secure his person and drive off his herds. For two uneasy days the two deputations conferred or marched together; then 'the Emir' fled by night from a fate at which he had rightly guessed. Baslé returned to Gondar with such of the Bani Amir cattle and camels as he had managed to retain, but was greeted there (the record says) with mirth and mockery.

So ended the Negus's attempt to assert his power in Bani Amir country.

## VII

### A CENTURY OF THE TIGRAI

#### 1. *Eritrea in Transition*

THE survey of the Eritrean communities made in the last chapter reveals them, or most of them, as having reached by the eighteenth century a condition substantially similar to that of our own times. There will still be changes—the grant or suppression of freehold lands, the arrival or emergence of new families to form new endas; modification, as time went by, of the master-serf relationship where such existed; settlement of new immigrant tribes on the outer fringes; and a change in religion among the people of the north. Apart from these, and the foundation of towns and the slow increase of modernity—the slow lightening of darkness—which ensuing centuries inevitably brought to the least obscured of Ethiopian provinces, the Eritrea of 1750 was racially and in general economically that of to-day.

But its political life, and its relationship to the parent empire, had still far to travel. The days of a Bahr Negash ruling at Debarua, an equal Tigray Makonnen at Axum, with an all-powerful King of Kings behind and above them both, were over; while in the territory itself new units and a new conception of government were arising. These developments are due in part to natural and evolutionary causes, in part to a profound change which since the later sixteenth century had been increasingly apparent in the nature of the Ethiopian State.

#### 2. *The Kingdoms within the Kingdom*

It was indicated in an earlier chapter that the Ethiopian monarchy, in the third phase (late sixteenth to early eighteenth century) of its restored existence, met with difficulties for which its too-simple and too-egoistical conception of government found no solution.

The King of Kings himself had at the close of that period lost authority and prestige, though not yet his sanctity nor the force of his tradition; while the rivals to his effective power had grown and were growing more than dangerously.

By 1725 the great, or greater, days of Susenyos, Fasil, and Yasu were over; monarchs of far smaller stature were to wear their crown. The royal record was no longer one of conquest or lawgiving; the chronicles are those of hunting-parties and court intrigues, religious synods and brutal punishments, raids on the helpless and bare survival against the unending rebellion of the provinces. The tawdry magnificence of the court of Gondar and the servile deference still paid there to the Negus, may indeed have blinded some observers—and the king himself—to the realities of his case; and his power was still, in fact, a considerable factor in politics up to the last quarter of the eighteenth century. But the forces which first overwhelmed and then effectively destroyed the Solomonid monarchy were in full development by 1725, and were to remain all-powerful until the rise of the new monarchy of Theodore.

In earlier days the natural unit of society and of government was simple, small, and disunited; the king could rule where nature or society itself had divided. But it was inevitable that with increasing population, and widening circles of kinship and interest, and the military groupings called for by foreign invasion and mutual rivalry, the unit of singly ruled society should grow outward to its natural limits. Geography sometimes helped to define these—the Gojjam within the Blue Nile bend, the Tigrāi within the Takazzé, Shoa in its watered park country of pleasant mountain and cornfield, the Mareb-Mellash with its plateau and seaboard. Language, in the case of the Tigrāi, did still more, and suggested a natural unity which could not be resisted. Temperament played its part: the hard, restless, proud, and unforgiving Tigraean is not identical with the milder and less exclusive Shoan, nor to the fierce mystic of Gojjam. Tradition, too, inevitably grew up on regional lines, assisted by kinship and shared local associations, and often directed as a jealous hatred

(fed by suspicions, raids, atrocities) of the neighbouring group. In such as these lies the root of the age-long hatred between Tigrāi and Amhara.

It is not surprising, therefore, to see that processes of coalition on such lines had produced, by the eighteenth century, first the shadow and then the substance of sub-kingdoms in Ethiopia. They lacked a hereditary dynasty, save where a single family could maintain itself for three or four generations, they lacked material resources, and could conceive no adequate administrative machine; but there could be no mistaking the reality of Gojjam, Tigrāi, Lasta, Shoa, Amhara as units compact enough for the shifting treacheries of Ethiopian politics; and the Tigrāi was among the strongest of them.

These kingdoms—for such they became—did not, until towards the middle of the nineteenth century, aspire to more than local independence and the control of a puppet emperor. To rule without internal rivals, to take tribute and to pay none, to raid neighbours and to add fresh districts to the main consolidated unit—such were the aims of the Dejjach or Ras of the kingdom, content to admit the sacred superiority of a powerless nonentity in Gondar. None, until Theodore, aspired to more.

The kingdom of the Tigrāi—even without its remote but historical Axum traditions—was subject, as much as the others or even more, to the general influences which created and moulded them. None had more compactness, more homogeneity, more natural and cultural unity. Since the days of the Tigrāi Makonnen, who ruled but a fraction, around Axum and Adua, of the Tigrinya-speaking country, the old status of the districts had changed many times. There had been consolidation here, separation and bisection there; famous districts became of little account, a great personality could create a new unit and bring it to eminence; rival families or clans could struggle for supremacy and bring their country-side to cleavage if not to anarchy. District rulers were here hereditary (but on sufferance of the Ras), there appointed from without; and such rulers obeyed no bureaucratic rules, kept to no charter of liberties or boundaries,

fought each other, overlapped, claimed and counter-claimed, invoked and counter-invoked Ras, Negus, or a powerful neighbour.

As sole royal ruler of Eritrea the Bahr Negash was no more, though the title was still used and Debarua still his capital. The ruler of the Tigrai State, which had gradually formed as such, had sometimes a single representative in Mareb Mellash, but more usually a number, and all co-equal. He dealt with the Bogos tribes, the Zazzega Cantibai, or the Naib sometimes directly, sometimes through a governor installed on the plateau. His share in the gun-running of Massawa was generous, and this source of fire-arms among his greatest assets

Southern Eritrea, then, from the early eighteenth century, was an integral part of the Tigrai kingdom; paid tribute, contributed troops, accepted rulers from it or the confirmation in office of heads of its own ruling families. Henceforth, the history of the Tigrai (no longer that of an Ethiopian State) includes the history of Eritrea—with due reserve for the wide Eritrean areas never subject to Ethiopian or Tigraean rule, and for local history unconnected with it.

We pass, then, to consider a century of Tigrai history.

### 3. *The Tigrai, 1725-80*

Of the earlier Rases of the Tigrai, whose ultimately achieved position we have described above, much must be unknown. The date and manner in which rule of the Eritrean highlands became his, or of the slow substitution of all Tigrinya-speaking districts for the original and much smaller Tigrai ('Tigrai proper', as some travellers called it), can be surmised but is not recorded. It is certain that the process was gradual and—with many revolts and refusals by individual districts with a strong local loyalty and exclusiveness of their own—was only generally, in so far as it was ever, accepted as it came to correspond with the average man's conception of the group to which he felt himself to belong. As from enda to district was a main step in civic development, so was district to kingdom; and it was a step taken neither as firmly nor as irrevocably.

Nevertheless, in the earliest years of the eighteenth century the Ras of Tigrāi was already a figure ruling over no petty province. Ras Fares led large forces and himself secured the coronation of Naod, King of Kings, in 1708—only to be later arrested and exiled. The Negus Theophilus appointed his benefactor Justus as Ras of Tigrāi three years later; and Justus, a prince of outstanding merit, was himself next emperor. A successor in Tigrāi, Ras Robel, was the son of a Portuguese lady, and married a princess of the royal house. His daughter was the famous beauty Walatta Giorgis, the bride of Negus Bakaffa.

These are interesting suggestions of the high rank of the Tigrāi ruler; but his predominance in national affairs begins, a generation later, with the long reign of Ras Mikael Suhul. This prince—for such he became—was of humble origin in the district of Tembien. His attractive bearing and gifts of speech and diplomacy were added to martial qualities of the highest order—courage, grasp of situations, speed and ambition—but disgraced by the brutal cruelties of his race. Before the age of forty he was Ras of Tigrāi, devoted to the consolidation of his power and the internal discipline of his kingdom.

He comes first to notice when the Naib of Harkiko in 1745 detained and robbed a party of priests, with an escort of Muslim merchants, on mission from the Negus Yasu II to Alexandria. Later, on their return from Egypt, the Naib held them again for ransom. The Negus bade Ras Mikael punish him forthwith for this shameless affront; but Mikael's reluctance proved too clearly his own complicity. The Negus had the spirit to invade the Tigrāi. The Ras took steps to stir up the border tribes of Galla and Doba folk against the king, but this distracted Yasu only for a short campaign. In 1746 he returned to the attack. His summons to Mikael to submit was ignored; he invaded, isolated, and besieged the rebellious Ras. Mikael surrendered, and, his life barely spared by the persuasions of his friends at court, was to the general amazement restored a few months later to his government. By alliances beyond his own country he proceeded to increase his power and influence, and by raids (especially on

the Eritrean low country) his wealth. Forty years of almost kingly rule awaited him. For the first time all Tigrāi was united, and its ruler the most powerful figure in Ethiopia.

The predominance of Galla influences at the court of Gondar, due to intermarriage of the royal family with that race and the seeking of support against the upstart kingdoms wherever it could be found, was at this time alarming orthodox and patriotic Ethiopians. It offered to Ras Mikael the chance to pose as the national and Christian champion of his country against foreigners and Muslims. He protested at the admission, one by one, of Galla to the highest appointments in the State; he tried in vain to persuade the feeble Negus, Yoas I, to invade the Fung empire. Increasingly he was involved in the struggles for power around the court, which in his early years he had avoided; and the position of king-maker (or the kingship itself) was his for the taking. The record of the times is of ceaseless civil war, with false intrigue behind it and leading to it afresh. The defeat and brutal execution of rivals, the marriage of Ras Mikael with the fair daughter of the queen, his assassination attempted by the Negus Yoas—followed by the public hanging of the Negus—the poisoning of his dotard successor; rebellion, spontaneous and fomented, against the savage Tigraean, brutal suppressions and reprisals, proclamation of new puppet emperors, hanging of an Abuna: these are but episodes in the career of Mikael. It was during his long dominance at Gondar—of which for years he was Ras and autocrat—that he was visited by the dauntless giant Scotsman James Bruce of Kinnaird, who arrived at Massawa in 1769 and lived at Gondar until the end of 1771. Bruce was his friend, medical adviser, and frequent witness of his savage state-craft. His departure, disgusted with ceaseless bloodshed, was equally regretted by the old tyrant and by his beautiful young wife.

Little is recorded of the internal condition of the Tigrāi during the bloody but magnificent career of its veteran Ras. The ruling family of Zazzega continued to govern in Hamasien. The Naib was in high favour, and received for his family more grants of land on the highlands. Frontier folk, if still normally outside

the authority of the Ras, at least took heed to avoid his resentment. The districts of the Tigray uplands, from end to end, abstained out of respect or terror of the tyrant from acts likely to involve his anger. But the expenses of his court and army were paid by harsh exactions; his governors were everywhere, his tax-farmers and judgements unquestioned.

Amhara, where Galla influence was strong and sometimes paramount, remained at this period the centre of legitimacy by reason of the Negus's residence at Gondar; but apart from this, its districts, under rulers sometimes imposed and sometimes hereditary, were major factors in the endless and bloody politics of the time. Lasta was a strong and compact district often able to play a decisive part. Gojjam could offer a strong force to whoever would respect its freedom and oppose the hated aliens at court. Shoa, from the middle of the eighteenth century, had, under its own well-founded monarchy, seceded entirely from the rest of Ethiopia, and admitted neither tribute nor overlord. It will remain thus distinct until the reign of Theodore.

The last decade of Ras Mikael's rule was filled with reversals of fortune as striking as any in his career. Old and decrepit, he was competent yet again to fight a coalition of his enemies, was forced back and besieged in Gondar, captured and banished; then—just as a generation earlier—was able to re-enter his own province, put to a terrible death the successor whom he had found installed, and end his days securely at home. He died in 1780.

#### 4. *The Tigray, 1780-1850*

It was by a strange fortune that the Tigray was to be ruled for a further seventy years by outstanding personalities, the shortest of whose reigns was of twelve years. They accustomed the country to realize its true and inherent unity, and their prestige (in two cases their popularity) availed, relatively at least, to keep down disorder and rebellion in a time and place where these were endemic. With no danger of aggression from without, and a firm hand ruling within, the condition of the Tigray, and its



northern part the Mareb Mellash, was as favourable as they had known or as a government so concerned could make it.

The succession of Ras Mikael's son, Gebra Maskal, was at once and successfully opposed by Walda Selassie, the son of that Kefla Yasu whom, as usurper of his own office, Mikael had put to death in 1773. Both, for a time, claimed the title and government; each had his own candidate for the imperial throne. But Walda Selassie prevailed; and constantly improving his position throughout the Tigray by his amiable yet forceful personality, maintained his rule till his death more than a generation later, in 1816.

He inherited the position of Mikael as champion of the orthodox and traditional Ethiopia against the Galla, the pagan, and the Muslim. With the mayors of the Palace at Gondar—for such they had become, with the King of Kings now only of ceremonial interest—he kept relations of jealousy, war, occasional precarious alliance. Ras Ali of Beghemeder, Galla protagonist, allied with the party of Mikael's heirs in Tigray; but this failed and Ali died. Gugsä, next leader of the Galla party, became Ras of Amhara, and put his own puppet on the throne; then matched Walda Selassie's marriage with a royal princess by forcing his own sister on the Negus. War between them broke out over religious funds. It was carried by Gugsä into Tigray itself in 1807 by a Galla invasion and by the insurgence, once again, of Ras Mikael's party.

This time the revolt was serious. Adua was burnt, and the Ras's own life barely saved by his English retainer, Nathaniel Pearce. He triumphed, and treated the rebels with characteristic clemency. A further Galla invasion was victoriously repelled.

Trouble in the Agamé district (south of the present Eritrean frontier) was due to the rise to leadership of the whole compact district by Shum Walda, a native of the sub-district of Irob. Walda Selassie confirmed him in the rule of his district, which his numerous offspring consolidated.

Walda Selassie died in 1816, regretted by many or most of his subjects and by his English friends. His death left Gugsä the

greatest figure in Ethiopia. But the Galla failed to achieve the government of the Tigray, nor could his son Marié, after his death in 1825, attempt it. The succession went instead in 1818 to Sabagadis, son of Shum Walda of Agamé. He was an educated, travelled and enlightened man. He made Adua his capital, abstained from entering deeply the turmoil of sordid and dangerous politics west of the Takazzé—boundary of the Tigray—and gave to his own kingdom a twelve-year peace long remembered as its Golden Age. He was moderate in his demands for tribute and levies, used wisely the advice of Pearce and Coffin at his court, and kept open and active the trade routes to Massawa. The Naib served him loyally on the coast, and he was supported in a reasonable and pacific policy by the *Zazzega* ruler of Hamasien, Ato

But the limitations of the Tigray state are clear enough. There was reserve and suspicion (because of more vivid and urgent counter-loyalties) in the devotion of its own subjects. There were rival powers across the Takazzé, of whom a sudden combination might at any time prove too strong. There were unsubdued and disloyal Galla elements on its borders. Above all, there was no continuity of Tigray dynasty. In Lasta, Dejjach Ubié was the sixth of his line; in Shoa, the royal family had unbroken succession for generations. But in the Tigray the death of each Ras reopened the field for the strongest, from within or from without the kingdom. No son of Mikael, nor of Walda Selassie, nor of Sabagadis could succeed. If the Tigray had had the good fortune of Shoa in a line of rulers with enough of prestige to survive the shock of death and succession, it might well be an independent kingdom to-day. It possesses, as a political unit, all the requisite elements which Eritrea lacks.

Sabagadis fell a victim to alliance between Marié—still firmly in control of Amhara and of the Negus—and Ubié, hereditary ruler of Lasta and son of Gugsä's daughter. The latter for a time intrigued with both Marié and Sabagadis. Favouring the former, he married the daughter of the Tigracan. Then he allied himself openly with Marié, demanded the government of

the Tigrai as his price, and obtained it by a battle which cost both Sabagadis and Marié their lives. Dori succeeded Marié at Gondar. Ubié assumed the government of the Tigrai in 1831.

But he had no easy task. Sabagadis had been loved; Ubié was a foreigner who owed his post to treachery and force. Walda Mikael, son of Sabagadis, assumed the title of Ras of Tigrai, and his family for ten years fought, with widespread support in the kingdom, to make it a reality. His place as head of the resistance movement was taken by Kassa, his ardent and brilliant kinsman of the house of Agamé. There followed years of guerrilla war and defiance, aggression, escape, return. No year passed without its local rebellion, its reprisals and brutal raids, its burning of homes and property. Ubié was a drunkard and a callous oppressor; but he was capable, crafty, and tireless, and able in the end to master his unruly subjects. By 1838 the Tigrai was outwardly pacified.

Such peace was precarious. In 1839 for the first time he failed to leave his native Lasta. Rebellion in the Tigrai flared up on every hand—in Tembien under Gebra Rafael, in Agamé under Kassa, in Hamasien under Hailu, son of Ato. But Ubié was neither weak nor slow. His army appeared in Tigrai and forced a wedge between his enemies. Kassa bolted to Agamé, Hailu submitted and was pardoned and reinstated. Kassa emerged again, but was captured and kept prisoner.

The role of the Tigrai as anti-Galla champion was not forgotten, and war to the knife between it and the Galla-dominated Amharic powers was inevitable. At Gondar, Ras 'Ali, son of Marié, was led by the vacillating ambition of a weak character, and dominated by his virago mother. At Ubié's court of Lasta and the Tigrai a new force had appeared—the corrupt and vicious scoundrel whom, under the name of Salama, Ubié had brought in state from Alexandria as Abuna of the Church. His role was to support the Ras with spiritual thunders, and to proclaim as orthodoxy the peculiar doctrinal heresy of the Tigraeans.

Open defiance by Ubié of Ras 'Ali and his nominal suzerain followed in 1842—the Tigrai's final attempt at primacy. It

failed; at the battle of Debra Tabor the Tigraean prince and his tame bishop were, after a day of brilliant victory, themselves captured in the midst of their drunken celebrations. But 'Ali was no Ras Mikael. He forgave and reinstated Ubié in his provinces, demanding only recognition of his own supremacy and the payment of a token tribute. The Abuna changed sides, and stayed at Gondar. Ubié on his return suppressed the rebellion which inevitably had broken out behind his back.

Five years later, after bitter wars between Amhara and Gojjam, a sack of Gondar, and another change of sides by the Abuna, further fighting began between forces of Ubié and Ras 'Ali—to be followed by a further truce. The needs of Ubié's treasury were met by measures for which he was long detested: giant raids on the Bani Amr and the Kunama-Baria, many times repeated. The latter tribes, it was said, were reduced from 200,000 to 15,000 souls; but the first figure is certainly exaggerated.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the Ethiopian world, now threatened (as will be seen) by new Islamic enemies from the west, was cloven into three great divisions. Ubié dominated the Tigray and strong districts outside it. The king of Shoa was wholly independent, and waxing rich. Both these and the heads of the less unified realm of Amhara and Gojjam were acting, in all relations, as independent kings, treating with foreign powers, bestowing territory. The last traces of imperial unity had long vanished. The future of Ethiopia in 1850 seemed to be one of balance—or endless clashes—of power between equal rivals. None could have foreseen—scarcely imagined—the remaking, within five years, of an even nominally united empire; yet such was to be, and its creator was already upon the scene. He was to be favoured by two factors, besides his own genius: the first, weariness in all Ethiopia of endless war and bloodshed and rapine; the second, the menace of Islam upon the frontiers.

### 5. *The Threat of Egypt*

The motives of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha in his invasion of the Sudan in 1820 were mixed. He need expect no resistance—the

Fung empire at Sennar was long decadent and powerless; his own ambition required ever new outlets; he had a restless army to keep employed, and needed a new and vast recruiting-ground for slaves and soldiers. Moreover, there were stories of gold in Nubia, and the empire of Ethiopia (and in it the sources of the Nile) to occupy and convert.

The conquest was of the simplest. The Fung power fell at a touch. The Sudan became a province of the viceroy of Egypt.

The first contact with the Beja tribes of Taka (the province of the Gash delta) was in 1823, when an expedition under the infamous Daftardar, Muhammad Bey al Stambuli, raided and decimated them at Sabderat. They were revisited, with slaughter and ravaging, in 1832 by Khurshid Pasha the Governor-General, and again in 1836. In 1840 Ahmad Pasha abu 'Udan founded the standing camp, which became the city, of Kassala. The western border of Eritrea had a new and threatening neighbour.

For the next twenty years the Egyptian Government in Taka was operative only in the form of raiding-parties, based on the Kassala fortress; nor did the succession of the well-meaning Sa'id Pasha to the viceregal throne bring any novelty. His Utopian decrees on slavery and taxation were rather smiled at than obeyed; and his officers continued without restraint to raid far into the hills of Eritrea—to the Barka valley, and the wooded hills of the Kunama country. These areas were assumed, without question, now to be Egyptian territory.

In 1838 an Egyptian force had occupied Matamma, farther south, had collected tribute, and threatened the royal city of Gondar. But the Ethiopian reprisals for this last campaign were effective; the Egyptian forces were defeated and hundreds slain by Ras Kamfu, while Ubié of the Tigray protested to Egypt against the aggression, and through French influence Khurshid Pasha was recalled. The Ja'alín (Beja) families who had assassinated Isma'il Pasha (son of Muhammad 'Ali) in the original campaign of 1822 had taken refuge in the Setit country under Ethiopian (that is, Ubié's) protection, and for the next twenty years raided into the Sudan.

Meanwhile Egyptian penetration into the Eritrean lowlands grew more menacing, and formal Egyptian claims more exaggerated. The Firman issued to the Pasha of the Hijaz, conquered by the viceroy's arms in 1818, bestowed the Pashalik of the Hijaz 'and Abyssinia'—a claim, based solely on the occupation of Massawa, to a country where no Egyptian or Turkish foot had ever trodden; but one from which, with all the viceroy's deference to British and French wishes, neither he nor his governors of the Sudan receded. And in practice the raids from Kassala pushed farther and farther eastwards. The Bani Amir accepted formal Egyptian suzerainty and the Pasha's confirmation of their Diglal; next they joined with their new masters in plans for joint ravaging of the Bogos tribes.

In 1853 a first raid under Elias Bey, governor of Taka, found the Bilein tribesmen forewarned; he burnt their empty huts and slaughtered some old women. Next year Khasrau Bey, his successor, with regular troops and a Bani Amir levy in support, took the Bilein by surprise, killed fifty, burned their largest village, drove off four hundred women and children and sixty herds. Immediate protest was made to Kassala and Cairo by Father Stella, Lazzarist missionary of Keren, and by Chichele Plowden, the British Consul, who had hurried to the spot. Khasrau claimed the Bilein as his rebellious 'subjects' and refused all satisfaction; but the Cairo authorities rebuked, recalled, and finally imprisoned him, released captives and animals, and ordered compensation to be paid. But at the same time they built and garrisoned a fortress at Kufit in Bani Amir country.

A new and grave danger to the Tigrāi and to Eritrea had appeared. A reborn and aggressive Egypt confronted a feeble and disunited Ethiopia, in which, as it appeared, France and Britain were pursuing diverse policies. Islam, in all North Africa, was in ferment, Holy Wars were imagined, new sects—the Mirghani, the Senussi—were formed and grew. The probability in 1860 of an Egyptian invasion and conquest of the Tigrāi—perhaps of all Ethiopia—was strong.

At Massawa the same new spirit of aggression had shown

itself. The rise of Muhammad 'Ali and his Hijaz conquest led to a great increase in Turkish and Egyptian prestige. New orders reached the shabby and mongrel Massawa garrison, new standards were expected. The Naib became their correct and dependent functionary. Travellers were better treated, customs revenues more reasonably collected. The aggressive exactions of Bruce's days were no more.

A counter-attempt by Ubié in 1844 to enforce his suzerainty of the coast and to occupy Massawa itself miscarried. He harried the coastal areas, but could not land on Massawa island. The Turks replied by attempting, once again, to secure their footing on the mainland. In 1846 Massawa with Suakin was leased by them to Muhammad 'Ali Pasha for an increase in his formal tribute to the Porte. Ubié bade the new Pasha remember that the whole coast was Ethiopian; the Egyptian replied that Massawa and Harkiko were the Sultan's, and now the viceroy's; and followed his message by bombarding Harkiko from the sea. Ubié sent his general Kokebié to the spot. He again raided the Massawa outskirts and was finally bought off for two thousand dollars. In 1849 the lease to Muhammad 'Ali lapsed on his death, and a Turkish force from Jedda reoccupied Massawa. The Naib, through it all, remained the indispensable agent and go-between, and Massawa the most infamous slave-port in the Red Sea. The strife between the two Houses of the Naib's family was never composed, intrigue never at an end.

Turkish and Egyptian activity, from both western and eastern fringes of Eritrea, hastened a process that had been long operating—the conversion of the ruling caste of the Bilein and Bait Asghedé, the Mensa and Marea from Christianity to Islam. Among the serfs many or most were already Muslims from centuries back; and the masters themselves had long sustained the pressure of Muslim neighbours and subjects and such persistent agents of propaganda as the Naib and the Dighal. The pitiless raids of Ubié showed them the low value of a Christian overlord; and Egyptian raiders would perhaps be less ferocious against fellow Muslims. The pious and miracle-working Sheikh al

Amin, new-come to the Bogos and founder of the present tribe of Ad Shaikh, had since 1800 added his persuasive evangelism and that of his followers. By 1850 the process of conversion was complete, and the old Churches stood in ruins.

#### 6. *European Visitors, 1700-1850*

The agreement between the Negus Fasil and the Turkish power at Suakin and Massawa to prevent all Europeans from entering, was effective for a century and a half. After the expulsion of the Catholic missions in the sixteen-thirties, very few of the Fathers ventured back in search of souls or martyrdom, though a Catholic settlement near Adua still existed; and no European has left records of the important commerce, through Massawa, of Ethiopia with Egypt. The French chemist Poncet, who was sent from Cairo in 1698 by Consul de Maillet to treat the Negus Yasu, left a description of his travels, but did not pass through Eritrea. Certain Jesuits and Franciscans, who reached, or tried to reach, the court of Gondar early in the eighteenth century, also used the Nile approach to Ethiopia—Fathers Grenier and Paulet, Father Benedetto, and Dom Joseph. The last-named in 1702 escorted seven Ethiopian boys to Rome for instruction in the Catholic faith. A French Vice-Consul, Lenoir Du Roule, sent to Gondar by de Maillet, was instead murdered in Sennar in 1705.

The travels and residence of James Bruce in 1769-71 have already been mentioned. They, and his admirable account of them, mark an important stage in European knowledge of Ethiopia; but for a full generation he found no successor. In 1802 Lord Valentia was sent by Pitt to investigate Red Sea trade possibilities—an area made suddenly significant by Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. Valentia, accompanied by Henry Salt, cruised the Eritrea coast, gave his surname Annesley to the Gulf of Zula, and sent Salt inland to Ras Walda Selassie. Salt returned in 1808 with presents on a further mission, this time to the emperor; but that potentate being an inaccessible



nonentity, took his presents instead to the Ras of Tigrāi. With him were Pearce (a deserter able-seaman who stayed in the Tigrāi thereafter for many years) and Coffin who stayed even longer. Both were loyal servants of Walda Selassie and of Sabagadis. Salt, later Consul-General in Cairo, urged the establishment of a British trading-post on the Red Sea.

The published works of Bruce, Salt, and Pearce, and the accessibility and favour of the Tigrāi rulers since 1780, appeared to the pious in Europe to reopen northern Ethiopia as a missionary field. Protestant societies in England this time took the lead, though the priests employed were Swiss and German. The Rev. Samuel Gobat of Berne lived in the Tigrāi on good terms with Sabagadis from 1829 to 1833, and returned there two years later with Knapf, Isenberg, and Blumhardt, all Protestants of German birth. With them was Wolff, a Jewish convert to Protestantism. The mission was centred at Adua, where it remained until forced to leave in 1838 by the ill-will of the Coptic clergy. Protestant missions did not reappear for thirty years.

In 1832 and 1833 were carried out the valuable explorations of the German Ruppel, largely geographical, and those of the botanist Schimper of Mannheim.

The fall of Sabagadis and expulsion of the Protestants opened the door to further Catholic enterprise, in which political interest was not unmixed. In 1834 the French Franciscans founded a mission, by favour of Ras 'Ali. Ubié was no less willing to favour them. He leaned towards them by reaction from the British who, in the persons of Pearce and Coffin, had been too warmly on the side of Sabagadis and his rebel heirs. From this and from French keenness to explore territory adjoining that of Egypt, their new sphere of influence, followed the expeditions of Combes and Tamisier, the brothers d'Abbadie, and (under direct French government patronage) of Ferrat and Galinier. All these, from 1834 to 1845, toured Eritrea, the Tigrāi and central Ethiopia, and published their records. They were followed through Massawa by Petit, Dillon, and Lefébure, of whom the first two lost their lives in Ethiopia. Lefébure gained

the high favour of Ubié, and offered him French protection. In return for this the Ras sent ambassadors to Paris and offered to cede the Dankali village ports of Edd and Thio, with a stretch of northern Dankalia inland. But France prudently refused the offer, and sent back the envoys empty-handed. A second mission of Lefébure, accompanied by a party of skilled artisans, was coldly received by Ubié and returned home.

More closely connected with Tigray and Eritrean politics was the journey of the Englishmen, W. C. Plowden and J. T. Bell, who, from love of adventurous travel, joined company in Egypt in 1843. Both stayed in Ethiopia until 1847, when Plowden returned to England and placed an account of northern Ethiopia before Lord Palmerston. He returned in 1848 with presents for Ras 'Ali, signed a commercial treaty with him, and stayed as Consular Agent and then as Consul. Bell lived on at the court of Ras 'Ali, to whom he was entirely devoted. Both Bell and Plowden were remarkable Englishmen; both were to find their graves in thankless Ethiopia. The Consulate in Massawa opened in 1849; a French Vice-Consul was there already.

With the d'Abbadies, in 1837, had travelled a young Italian Lazzarist and student of languages, Giuseppe Sapeto. He settled in Adua, and soon formed a circle of converts. Later he was to live for long years at Keren. His reports found favour at Rome, which entrusted to the Lazzarists the task of Catholic propaganda in Ethiopia. Sapeto was joined by the later famous de Jacobis, and by Father Montuori. Good progress was made by their efforts at Adua; but the all-powerful favour of Ubié was later withdrawn at the urging of the Abuna Salama, and the missionaries fled for their lives. De Jacobis, ordained bishop secretly and at night by the famous apostle of the Galla, Bishop Massaia, was to remain for many years a leading figure in the Tigray world. No nineteenth-century name is more often mentioned in Eritrea to-day than this 'Abuna Yakob'.

A curious episode is the visit to Gondar of the Belgian diplomat, Count Blondel, in 1840, to propose the purchase of the district of Agamé by his government as the nucleus of a colony.

Equally abortive was an approach by the kingdom of Sardinia, made through a missionary, Father Leone, to Negusié in 1858, for the cession of land on the Massawa coast. Negusié replied by a request for Italian armed forces to assist him, but his own defeat and death put an end to both the projects.

## VIII

### THE RESTORED MONARCHY

#### I *The Negus Theodore*

No eastern conqueror's romantic rise from peasant-boy to emperor is more remarkable than that of Kassa, son of Hailu. Born of obscure parents in 1818, he was thirty-six when after a life of intense activity and ambition as groom, brigand, gang-leader, frontier commander, general, courtier, husband of a royal princess, outlaw and formidable rebel, he emerged as the greatest figure in all Ethiopia west of the Takazzé, could challenge Ras 'Ali to final conflict, drive him from his home and country, and slay him in April 1853.

With Hailu Malakot, King of Shoa, far to the south and remote from the struggle, Ubié of the Tigray stood his only rival for supreme power. But the Tigray was itself unstable. Ubié on the death of 'Ali declared himself King of Kings, but his position was far from allowing him to substantiate the claim. The sons of Sabagadis were again in the field against him, and his favourite general Kokebié plotting secretly with the all-conquering Kassa. Ubié's star was in fact fast sinking. His French and Catholic friends could not help him, his people had never given him but a fearful and grudging loyalty; while Kassa, heralded by popular stories of a legendary King Theodore to arise and right all wrongs, and vastly popular by his epic feats, his courage and athletic prowess, his zeal in religion and lavish generosity, advanced irresistibly.

At the battle of Deraghié in February 1855 Kassa completely defeated Ubié and held him prisoner. Three days later he was crowned King of Kings, Theodore, by the thrice-treacherous hands of Salama the Abuna. The price of the obscene prelate for this act (which he had been about to perform for Ubié) was the expulsion of the Catholics, especially de Jacobis. Plowden joined Theodore from his post at Massawa and with

Bell thenceforth lived normally at his court. The obscure and dissolute King of Kings from Gondar, John III, was removed to captivity at Magdala, where the new capital and treasure-house were established.

With the reforms of Theodore—his 'laws' against brigandage, slavery, and mutilation; his financial and administrative arrangements; his decree for the conversion of Muslims and pagans; his support of monogamy and of the strict practices of the Church—we are little concerned; they had small practical effect, and the king himself was their most flagrant transgressor. Nor need his campaigns against the Galla, his annexation of the Shoan State and guardianship of the boy-heir Menelik, his quarrels with the Church and his endless suppression of endless risings, his wholesale cruelties, be recounted here. The restored universal monarchy of Ethiopia corresponded in no way to the dreams of the mystics, and brought happiness to none. And the character of the king, with private grief and bereavement, disillusion and harassing care, intemperance, and above all the total corruption of long absolute power, deteriorated with each year until his sanity was shaken if not destroyed.

In the Tigrai the first opposition of Guangul, son of Ubié, was quickly crushed, and the province handed to Kassa, son of Sabagadis. But resistance arose in every district, and coalesced under a natural leader Negusié, son of Walda Mikael of the Tigrai district of Avergallé. Peace had indeed departed from the Tigrai; years of guerrilla war, with raids and attacks on Theodore's garrisons, took its place. The emperor's attempt to split the province, by encouraging the sons of Sabagadis, was in vain. The forces of Negusié could defeat in pitched battles the generals sent by Theodore, could invade Semien and Dembea, suppress rivals to himself within the Tigrai, and spread his power over the Hamasien and Sarae in the Mareb Mellash. Eritrea and its local governors had a new master.

Negusié, by 1858, was a figure of real importance. He was the scarcely questioned leader of the whole Tigrai, successor of Ubié and Sabagadis. He was patron of the Catholic mission-

aries, and had received in 1856 a visit of the French Consul Beillard, at whose suggestion he sent in 1858 a mission to Paris and to Rome. Thus while the general anticipation of a Suez Canal gave a new interest to Red Sea affairs, France and Britain seemed to the world to have chosen each their candidate for control of the ever-interesting hinterland of Massawa—the French, Negusié; the British, Theodore.

From Paris in 1859 a French mission set out under Count Russel, accompanied by the ubiquitous and political missionary Sapeto. Russel's function was to cement the friendship with Negusié, and take up lands on the Eritrean coast. The mission survived shipwreck on the Sinai coast, and reached Britia to be received by Negusié in December 1859. The Count had time to inspect the Gulf of Zula and island of Desse, but could, thereafter, barely escape capture by the forces of Theodore which had been dispatched urgently into Tigrat for that very purpose. Negusié failed to stop his enemies at the Takazzé crossing, moved hurriedly into Akkele Guzai, fled and manœuvred; but the French mission was finally captured intact by the forces of Zarai, son of Theodore's governor of Hamasien. Russel and his colleagues, refusing a doubtless treacherous offer to buy their release, contrived to escape by night, and found safe sanctuary and escort with the Naib. A treaty made with Negusié's agent at Massawa at the eleventh hour granted Zula to France in exchange for friendship and fire-arms. But such a treaty, which ended the second attempt of France to enter the Ethiopian world, must needs be valueless. Negusié's day was over. Chased from Akkele Guzai into Sarae, from there to the Kunama country and thence to Shiré, he fell finally into the hands of his enemy and paid by a frightful death for his six-year reign in Tigrat.

His followers were sought out and exterminated—to a number, it was said, of 7,000—throughout the Tigrat. Many a village in the Eritrean highlands must have been depopulated.

2 *Magdala*

The familiar European figures of the time vanished, one by one, from the scene. The loyal and intrepid Bell, made by Theodore his Chief Equerry, was killed in a skirmish. Chichele Plowden, who had long refused to let ill health drive him from his duties, was murdered in 1859 on his way home. Bishop de Jacobis, tireless in evangelism and no stranger to politics, died in the Mareb Mellash in 1860.

But on balance the European element in the Tigrai and Eritrea had grown and was growing. Captain Cameron, successor to Plowden, took over the British Consulate in 1862, replacing the Consular Archivist, Baroni, an Italian, by Mr. Walker. Lejean was French Consul. The Duke of Saxe-Coburg visited Massawa and the Bogos area on a natural history expedition in 1863, and stayed there with Father Stella. A number of new lay missionaries—German, Swiss, Polish—were working as engineers and munition-makers in European settlements at Gaffat and Debra Tabor, and in Dembea. Many of these were accompanied by wives—European, Ethiopian, or half-caste—and children of various breeds.

Werner Münzinger, a young Swiss scholar and merchant, settled in Massawa in 1854 and acted sometimes as French Consular Agent; he lived at Keren from 1855 to 1861, married a Bilein lady or ladies, and learnt to speak Tigré as well as Arabic. He was back in Massawa in 1865 to officiate as British Agent, and did so until 1869. A remarkable career awaited his unusual ability and acquirements. Meanwhile he joined in the exploration of western and south-western Eritrea with von Heuglin, Kinzelbach, and Steudner. Other inquirers were Antinori, Beccani, and Issel, naturalists.

A hare-brained half-military colonizing enterprise was, with the blessing of the Khedive, launched in the Kunama country in 1863 by Count de Bisson, a Frenchman who claimed high connexions. It ended inevitably in fiasco and (true motive of the whole affair) claims to princely 'compensation'. The

Swedish Protestant Mission opened its first station, also among the Kunama, in 1866; but the truculence of the villagers compelled its withdrawal after three years. In 1869 an English sportsman, Mr. Thomas Powell, and his family and followers were murdered in the same territory.

The events which led to and included the campaign of Magdala and death of Theodore are well known, and belong chiefly to the general history of Ethiopia. If Plowden had lived, or if Cameron had been a smoother diplomat, or if Theodore had retained the balanced intelligence of his prime, all could have been avoided. Yet, as it was, they served to interest the public opinion of Europe for the first time in Ethiopian affairs, hitherto (in spite of the works of Bruce and Salt and the many travellers from 1800 to 1850) almost entirely unknown. And they freed Ethiopia from a tyrant no longer sane.

Theodore dispatched letters to Queen Victoria and to Napoleon III in November 1862, soon after Cameron's arrival. From Paris his messenger (Bardel, a French ex-servant of Cameron) returned to report a cold and uninterested reception. Theodore in wrath ordered the French Consul Lejean from the country. From London came no answer at all; the king's letter had been overlooked or forgotten. Other factors soon arose to increase his resentment—a suspicious visit of Cameron to Kassala, an insulting passage in Mr. Stern's published travels, intercepted letters to the British Consulate bidding Cameron withdraw to Massawa. The British Consul and his staff were seized and imprisoned.

The impression in England was profound. Public and parliamentary opinion began already to consider alternatives of force or diplomacy. Hormuzd Rassam, a Mosul Christian and former assistant to Layard in the Nineveh excavations, was sent from his post in the Aden Residency to present the long-awaited British reply, and to negotiate with the emperor; but his letters from Massawa to the king remained unanswered for a whole year, July 1864 to August 1865. Finally he was allowed by Theodore to proceed inland to his court, but by way of the



Sudan and Matamma. He reached the royal camp in January 1866, offered his presents, and secured a general release of the captives. These by now included almost all the Europeans in Ethiopia. A month later the royal humour had changed. All, and Rassam and his staff with them, were re-arrested and taken to Magdala. They arrived there in July 1866.

A last warning by letter from the British Government in April 1867 produced no result, and the decision to send an expedition, based necessarily on India, was reached after long vacillation. Its strength was fixed at four thousand British and eight thousand Indian troops, with twenty thousand followers and transport men. Advance parties under the Resident of Aden (Colonel Merewether) landed in Zula Bay, explored the routes inland with the invaluable help of Munzinger, and decided on Mulkutto as the landing-base and on the route by Senafé as the line of march. The first troops landed in October and established an advanced base at Senafé. Sir Charles Napier, Commander-in-Chief of the Bombay Army, landed to assume command in January 1868.

Four hundred miles of wild mountain country separated the Gulf of Zula from Magdala, the objective—a truly appalling problem of transport and protection. The transport of the expedition in fact initially broke down, and was improvised afresh by locally purchased mules and the active help of the population; its communications were never threatened. To this good fortune the amazing success of the campaign was due. Had it been otherwise—had Theodore (in his youth an outstanding strategist) attacked the flanks and harassed the staging-posts—the position of Napier would have been unenviable. But the king's troops were deserting in thousands, his power waning fast, his provinces everywhere in revolt; he himself barely reached Magdala with small forces from his last raid in Beghemeder. Or had the Tigrai chieftains resisted the British and Indian columns, or attacked the straggling and struggling transport trains and ponderous artillery, the problems of the expedition would have been a thousandfold multiplied.



*Asmara: part of the Corso Italia, formerly known as Viale Mussolini*



*Asmara, part of the Eritrean market*



It was otherwise; a powerful rebel from Lasta, Gobazié, had invaded the Tigrai in 1866, defeated Theodore's general Barai, seized Adua, and installed Kassa (son of the Ras of Tembien, and descendant of old Mikael Suhul) as ruler of Tigrai on his behalf. Kassa spread his influence far and wide, rallied all malcontents, threw off allegiance to Theodore and Gobazié alike, and by the end of 1867 was in all but name ruler of the whole Tigrai.

From Kassa of the Tigrai, from Mashsha, uncle of Gobazié, and from Gobazié himself, Napier had nothing but assistance, protection, and supplies. With the first two in person, and the third by letter, the Commander-in-Chief and his Intelligence and Supply officers were in cordial and daily touch. For the passage through the Saho country special arrangements were made and payments distributed for safe conduct. The Saho tribes, save for the murder of an Intelligence agent, Mr. Dufton, and minor depredations, behaved well. The expedition paid well for all supplies, and treated the native world with a reason and justice never before dreamed of in Eritrea.

The long columns moved slowly and painfully on Magdala. For the first time since 1542 European troops were seen in Eritrea. Their uniforms and ordered camps, their guns and elephants, their light railway and their vehicles astonished the precariously docile country-side, and are not forgotten in Eritrea to-day. The present writer has talked with two Eritrean chiefs, one in the Sarae and one at Harkiko, who saw it all. Traces of the railway are still visible, and the little cemetery at Senafé still tended.

Napier's first letter to the king, demanding surrender, was unanswered. The march proceeded. In April some opposition was offered at Aroghé by an Ethiopian force some three thousand strong, only to be mown down by British fire. The king then sent envoys (Mr. Flad, a missionary, and Captain Prideaux) offering friendship. Napier replied that it must be complete submission. Theodore attempted suicide, but failed. Next day he sent a herd of cattle as a present to the Commander-in-

Chief, and, believing it accepted and peace thus made, released all the prisoners. But the present was refused, and high land near his fortress was bombarded and occupied by the British. Magdala was easily and bloodlessly captured on 13 April 1868. Theodore shot himself. The captives were all well and unharmed.

Sir Charles Napier released all Ethiopian prisoners, dispatched Theodore's son to school in England, dispersed the crowds who had collected round Magdala, disposed of, or sent to England, the manuscripts and treasures of Theodore, burned the huts of the fortress and destroyed its guns, and presented muskets and ammunition to Mashsha and mortars and mountain-guns to Kassa of Tigrāi. He then withdrew himself and his forces to the coast, and embarked to leave Ethiopia to its own devices. The expedition, happy in its whole course, was happiest in its well-timed and disinterested departure.

### 3. *John IV*

Gobazié of Wag and Lasta, a proved friend to the captives of Magdala and helpful to the British expedition, was the strongest of the probable claimants to a throne which Napier had left empty. He was soon in arms; and, defeating a rival of the same name, was treated and was not slow to treat himself as the veritable King of Kings. He was so crowned at Gondar, with the throne name of Takla Giorgis.

But anarchy broke out in every quarter—in Beghemeder, in Yeju, among the Galla; and though Menelik of Shoa (who had escaped from Theodore's custody three years before and regained the throne of his fathers) accepted for the moment the new emperor's suzerainty, it was otherwise in Tigrāi.

Kassa (nicknamed Abba Bazbaz, 'father of Bazbaz', after his favourite horse) had been the closest and best rewarded of Napier's collaborators. He had used to the full his advantages of birth and relationship with the leading chiefs of the Tigrāi, of which his own father had for a time been Ras under Theodore. His sister was married to Gobazié, the new but unacknowledged

King of Kings. He had affirmed his position on the Eritrean plateau, and intervened with authority in the civil wars of the Hamasien.

After months of hesitation, face to face with a host of suspicions and difficulties at home and abroad, he wrote to the monarchs of Europe—and, less wisely, to the Pasha of Egypt himself—for assistance. None came. Kassa had no choice but to trust to his own resources. He prepared for the final struggle with Gobazié.

He proclaimed his independence from his suzerain, insulted his messenger; then mustered his army, strong in its new weapons, to meet his would-be overlord. The battle was fought near Axum in the last days of 1871. Kassa was outnumbered. But his troops were better disciplined, and under the orders of Sergeant Kirkham (an adventurer of varied career, bequeathed by Napier to Kassa as military instructor) controlled a deadly fire. The King of Kings was wounded, then captured, blinded and imprisoned. Kassa was crowned on 21 January 1872 at Axum, as the Emperor John IV. He made Adua his capital. For the first time a chief of the Tigrāi had achieved the imperial crown.

His early days were passed, as by every King of Kings, in asserting by his arms an authority far from complete. He moved, with the speed of decision that was his greatest asset, from rebel to rebel, from the Galla Azabo to Beghemeder, thence to Gojjam, where Ras Adal was confirmed in office. Menelik of Shoa, ever patient and prudent, accepted until better times the nominal overlordship of the new emperor, as of the last.

Rated by some observers as of low intelligence and 'a poor creature', and in fact falling short of the highest qualities, John IV was, nevertheless, an astute diplomatist, rapid and brave in action, pious and scholarly. He was free, though not entirely and less than Menelik, from the streak of abominable cruelty all too common in Ethiopian rulers; and though bigoted and mystical in religion, the most modern-minded ruler—save perhaps Sabagadis—who had yet appeared in the Tigrāi.

## IX EGYPTIANS AND ITALIANS

### 1. *Eritrea, 1870*

THE reforms of Theodore represent in some measure an attempt to invent a machinery of government such as the Ethiopian State, in greatness as in decline, had always lacked. The arrangements and the nomenclature used in the provinces after his time seem, at least, to suggest the effort for more ordered government. Such government must, of course, be based on the social structure of the people; it adopted, therefore, as its lowest unit in the Tigray and southern Eritrea, the village under its Chikka. The latter's authority, as judge and subordinate tax-collector, cut across the grouping by endas, fundamental as this was (and is) in land-holding and in social life. Above the Chikka came the Feresegna, the direct representative of higher—that is, the royal—authority, especially in tax-collection. There would be appointed a Feresegna to every village where these were not grouped in one of the districts based on extended clan kinship, such as the Carneshim, Dekki Teshim, or Dembezan; or one to each such district or village group where this had unity and a hereditary ruling family.

The Feresegna—differing somewhat in title and in power according to the locality and person—was himself but the local deputy of the royal governor, the Koraj. The title as well as the conception of Bahr Negash fell out of use after the early years of the century; province governors (for the Sarae, Akkele Guzai, and Hamasien, or sometimes for major parts of these) took his place; and they in turn showed little bureaucratic regularity in name, powers, or area of control. The Koraj, or more than one, represented the king's government in Eritrea, and the post was the ambition of the leading clan heads of the plateau as well as of high officers, and even near relations, of the Negus.

By reason of the long ascendancy of Zazzega in the hereditary

rule of the Hamasien, this village was for many years the seat of the Koraj after Debarua had lost its standing; Ras Alula was the first to desert it. But Zazzega ascendancy was itself, by the mid-nineteenth century, no longer assured. Early in the century the age-long jealousy and resentment of the rival Hazzega found leadership in Ato Solomon, who, for a time, displaced the ruler of Zazzega as governor of the Hamasien. Zazzega returned to power, but seemed, under the feeble Gebracristos, likely again to lose it. His successor Ato Tuwoldemedin fought unceasingly and not unsuccessfully to reduce his rival and other malcontents to obedience; Hailu, son of Ato, succeeded in the task. Then he in his turn was expelled, fled to the Negus, was restored. In 1860 he was again ruling Hamasien and Sarae and gathering taxes in Shiré. But in Merid of Hazzega he had a strong opponent, and in Merid's younger brother, yet a stronger. This was the long notorious Waldenkiel (Walda Mikael).

Hailu, a good administrator, never established satisfactory terms with Kassa, the Tigrai ruler and future emperor. He aroused suspicion by seeking to forestall him as earliest friend of the Napier Expedition, and was excluded from the Durbar at Adua in February 1868. Later he was arrested and imprisoned for supporting Gobazié in the final struggle for the crown, and for alleged relations with the Egyptians.

At this period it is possible to follow for a few years, from the reports of Munzinger to the Quai d'Orsay, the ever-changing story of rule in the Hamasien—the appointment, then removal and imprisonment, of Waldenkiel; the restoration, then defeat and violent death, of Hailu; the appointment, then rebellion, of Kassa Golja, the approach of Lij Makonnen, son of Waldenkiel, to the Egyptians, and that of Waldenkiel himself to Napoleon III. It ended in the release and reappointment of Waldenkiel, who was to rule as the brutal tyrant of the Hamasien and Sarae for twelve years. During most of this time he was openly disloyal to, and hated by, his sovereign, and in close relation with his enemies. Nevertheless, there could be no other Koraj until his fall. He carried his arms to the Setit and deep into the Keren



mountains, where the Bilein, Mensa, and Marea suffered grievous and still unforgotten loss from his bloody assaults and cattle-driving. To savage misgovernment he was soon to add open treason, and be nicknamed Ras 'Alī for his devotion to the Muslim enemy.

Between the three plateau provinces of Eritrea—Hamasiēn, Sarāe, Akkele Guzai—a marked difference of social order had grown up during the century now ending. In culture there was none, none in religion or language, nor in the network of inter-enda relationships which, on the essential basis of kinship, gave a natural unity to certain districts. But Hamasiēn had become accustomed to a hereditary governor, combining headship of local communities with royal authority; the Sarāe had ranged district against compact district, powerful fief against fief, chieftain against chieftain, and, while accepting usually the authority of the Zazzega Cantibai or Dejjach, lived in a world of feudal politics and struggles of its own. Akkele Guzai was a region of small democratic elder-governed enda units, disunited and politically unambitious. Feuds with the Sarāe folk across the Mareb were a tradition.

In Akkele Guzai settled many of the Catholic converts of de Jacobis, fathers of the present active colony around Saganeiti. Others collected in the Irob district of Agamé, on the Eritrean frontier. More were the fruits of Stella and Sapeto's, Delmonte and Touvier's teachings at Keren, where the mission was well established and not unpopular. Against all these the animosity of Kassa, before and after his elevation to the throne, knew no limits. It revealed in him an evil strain of fanaticism, and cost him the goodwill of the French. The missionaries themselves could not but turn in despair to the Egyptians for protection.

In all the plateau provinces the present-day codes of customary law had long been in use, each deriving from shared traditions of the folk and from the Fatha Negast, but each in lesser matters differentiated by varying provisions for divorce, compensation, and inheritance. Each code—there are six in Hamasiēn alone—had by 1850 reached an almost final form,

verbally formulated and remembered by the greybeards, and adequate to most needs of the enda's private and community life.

Elsewhere in Eritrea there had been slow movement with the times. The remote Danakil were watching the Egyptian threat—to them, a welcome advent of Muslim power. The Saho gave up nothing of their old trade of highway blackmail ('the worst people on earth', reported the Rev. Mr. Knapf) but had at least now seen a power greater than their own, and in their midst. The Naib had lost much of his authority in the near presence of greater forces, but he was still the hinterland spokesman of Turkish or Egyptian power and received both taxes and diplomatic approaches from Bait Asghedé and the Samhar. Under his influence, and that of time, the Samhar tribes were gradually forming into their present units, assuming present names and locations, finding their level of neighbourship with the Saho and with the annually descending highland graziers. The Samhar was politically no-man's-land. Controlled loosely by the Naib, its sovereignty was claimed by Turks and Ethiopians with equal urgency, and by each with reason. Economically, the area was necessary to both.

Farther north, on the Sahil coast, a pure Arab tribe from the Yemen, the Rashaida, last of so long a series of such immigrations, were in the sixties or seventies to settle in Eritrea and to be the only coastal tribe of that area which never ascends to the highlands. They are camel- and goat-breeders, and Arabic-speaking.

Like the Samhar tribes, those of Bait Asghedé in the Nagfa and Sahil districts, and those of the Bogos mountains, were now settled in their economic régime and their present boundaries. Their old Christianity was already half-forgotten, their legends of Muslim origins fully formed; the ancestors of their present-day chieftains had assumed the leadership of tribe and sub-tribe. The efforts of the Lazzarists at Keren reconverted some few of the Bilein, as the Swedish Protestants later were to work among the Mensa. But a far greater need in their lives,

since the great raid from Kassala in 1854 and those now launched with pitiless violence by Waldenkiel, was self-preservation under new masters able to protect them. Kassa, the future King of Kings, was not unaware of their troubles, which increasingly resembled those of the Kunama. He even sent them, as governor of the Bogos, a Frenchman, René, who was serving him as armourer. But René could not withstand the ogre of the Hama-sien, and was soon back at Adua. Indeed, the French 'protectorate' of Keren, half-claimed by the Catholic Fathers and by the Consul at Massawa, did little enough to protect it.

Throughout Eritrea at this period of the eighteen-sixties there were signs of civilization, as it is now understood, only at the Catholic mission stations, and at Massawa. At the latter a few two-storied dwellings marked the residence of Muslim merchants; there was a mission house and the French and British consulates. Two or three representatives of these nations, with a handful of Greeks and Armenians, formed the European society of the place. The wealthier Muslims lived well, with their own little-varying culture. The Consuls had each a country villa at Monkullo, where the Swedish Mission was soon to be established. Elsewhere in the territory, traversed by wild tracks from village to village (and these blocked by frequent customs-posts of the tax-gatherers), the decencies and amenities of modern life were yet unknown. The most famous settlements—Debarua, Zazzega, Halai—were sordid straggling villages of huts. Shops were unknown, markets held weekly at a few centres; nor was anything for sale which could suggest refinement or even comfort. Currency was known only at some of the larger markets, and then in the form of the Maria Theresa dollar; elsewhere purchase was by barter for salt or cloth-lengths. Domestic comfort was unimagined. Clothing was of local and rarely of Indian cotton cloth, and of skins. Weapons were carried by all wayfarers, fire-arms increasing fast in numbers. Slavery was uncommon in the highlands, but Massawa flourished in the trade of kidnapped children. The profession of the mercenary soldier was among the commonest, and priests

in hundreds lived on the terrors of the villagers. Agriculture was practised in the simplest of forms; handicrafts, especially the blacksmith's, were despised and relegated to an inferior class.

## 2. *The Wars with Egypt*

The Egyptian power in the Sudan failed, for a time, to fulfil the threats which had rightly alarmed the King of Kings in 1854. Their power was, indeed, undisputed in Bani Amir territory; they raided and taxed the Baria and Kunama and loomed with menace towards the Bogos; and the spiritual power of the Mirghani family in the eastern Sudan gained, for them and for Islam, converts and goodwill. But the reign of the Khedive Sa'id was pacific. He withdrew the garrison of Kufit, and took no step towards displacing the Turks at Massawa.

With the accession of Isma'il Pasha to the Khedivate—a prince intelligent, educated, ambitious, and abounding in youthful energy, but ill balanced and unwise—significant changes soon appeared. He admitted in 1863 to a British diplomat, indeed, that he had no claims to Bogos or other Ethiopian territory, and seemed in 1869 to accept the frontier of the Gash (while claiming Kunama allegiance), and he showed every complaisance to the Napier Expedition, which disembarked beside his post at Arafali. Nevertheless he had taken over, by Firman from the Sublime Porte, the ports of Suakin and Massawa in 1865, in which year a serious mutiny broke out among his troops at Kassala; and he was undoubtedly prepared, as his troop dispositions in Taka province and at Massawa itself showed, to profit if possible by any situation to which the British expedition might lead. He had, meanwhile, abstained from acceding to requests, handed to his governor at Massawa by Sahil and Bogos tribesmen, for 'protection'; nor did he, dissuaded by French and British diplomacy, follow his first instinct of intervening in Ethiopian affairs when invited thereto by Kassa himself in 1870.

The attitude, therefore, of Isma'il was correct until the eighth decade of the century had begun, nor did he ever fail to allege

his pure zeal for suppression of the slave-trade, but his ambitions, based on largely false information and his own impetuous nature, were not the less real. They took immediate shape when Münzinger, who had quarrelled irrevocably with Kassa, his erstwhile friend, over the Catholic missions and private grievances, and whose German leanings tended to estrange him from France in 1870, joined the Egyptian service in April 1871 as governor of Massawa. To this event can be traced not indeed the general policy of Egypt, but its immediate form, impetus, and timing.

Munzinger, as governor, had two first cares. He improved Massawa by building the two dykes which link the islands to the mainland, and refacing the sordid primitive quays. He built also, for his own use, the palace which still stands, a barracks for the Egyptian garrison, and an aqueduct from river-bed wells inland. He was at the same time concerned to enlarge his area of command, and to include in it Keren, so long his home. His change of attitude was complete. Egypt, the dreaded enemy of his former protégés, was now justified in everything, could claim anything. The Khedive's disclaimer of 1863 was forgotten; the raids of Abu 'Udan in 1840 were now the basis of Egyptian pretensions to Keren and the Bogos.

Munzinger, instructed and approved by his new master, lost no time. In June 1872 he led Egyptian troops from Massawa to Keren, occupied the fort of Senheit, and declared the province Egyptian. The pretext was a petty Ethiopian raid across the Setit, and the more genuine appeals of the Keren chiefs to be, at long last, protected. Simultaneously he acquired, by local bargaining from its chief, the Ailet area inland from Massawa, and planned a telegraph line from Massawa to Kassala. He had already the goodwill of Ras Waldenkiel (self-appointed to that rank), whose policy was savagely pro-Egyptian and who had been heavily bribed in fire-arms by these invaders. A number of the Hamasien chiefs, indeed, begged Munzinger to occupy their province, and the same request came from tribe leaders of the Danakil.

As governor of his beloved Keren, Münzinger was at his best. He freed slaves, settled disputes, dealt with tribal leaders each in their degree, improved the settlement and fort of Senheit. Nor did he fail to think ahead to an early occupation of the Hamasien itself, true gateway to Ethiopia.

King John, barely restrained by his advisers from declaring war, protested in strong terms to the Khedive, claimed the Kunama-Baria and the Bogos country as his own, and sent his man of confidence—no other than Sergeant Kirkham, now an Ethiopian general, though ill groomed for the part—to most of the governments of Europe to excite sympathy and obtain support. This strange ambassador, who was rewarded with the life-governorship of Ghinda, obtained little for his employer; but at least the case was ventilated, some questions asked of the Khedive and correct assurances received, and a satisfactory letter sent by Queen Victoria to John IV. Meanwhile Münzinger was created governor of the whole of eastern Sudan, with the rank of Pasha and a portfolio of plans for further Egyptian 'expansion'. The lack of interest shown by Great Britain (and her poor information since the withdrawal of her Consul) and the weakness of defeated France suggested that Egyptian plans had nothing to fear. The military power of Ethiopia was unwisely judged by the collapse of Theodore in 1868; that of the Egyptian army was greatly exaggerated.

As part of the same expansion movement (or, as the Khedive claimed, further to suppress the slave-trade) Tajura, Berbera, and Zeila were occupied by Egyptian forces—the whole coast of the Gulf of Aden—and an Egyptian army under Rauf Pasha entered Harrar in October 1875. The policy, it seems, was more than mere acquisitiveness of coastal key points; it was also to support Menelik of Shoa against his suzerain and then, while attacking frontally, to stab Tigrai in the back also.

These plans (which Egyptian historians deny) anyhow failed. Münzinger himself took charge of the southern operations, landed at Tajura, and advancing inland camped with his force—and his wife—near the salt lake of Assal. He was there

murdered and his force destroyed on 14 November 1875 by a band of Danakil.

Simultaneously another Egyptian column of two thousand men landed at Massawa under Colonel Ahrendrup Bey, a Dane, and Arakil Bey, nephew of Nubar Pasha, and advanced without precautions to the obscure hamlet of Asmara, and on to that of Adi Quala. On 14 November—the day of Munzinger's death—it reached the Mareb. The Negus with 50,000 men and his best general Ras Alula met, outmanœuvred, and overwhelmed the Egyptian force at Gundet. It was almost completely destroyed.

The Khedive and all Cairo were in consternation, while the Egyptian press absurdly minimized the disaster. A second army, less obviously inadequate, was quickly mustered. It consisted of twenty-five battalions, fifty guns, and was accompanied by the Khedive's own son, Hasan Pasha, with Ratib Pasha in effective command and an American, Colonel Loring, as Chief of Staff. The force concentrated at Massawa in December 1875, and proceeded, this time with all military precautions, to the plain (and future great air-port) of Gura, where a fort and fortified camp were prepared.

The Negus John, in a veritable holy war against Islam, was able to rally his subjects for once with unanimity. Enthusiasm brought recruits in flocks to his standard. He soon had an army of 70,000 men—but only 10,000 armed with rifles—ranged against the invader.

It is agreed between Egyptian and Ethiopian authorities that the ensuing battle occupied three days, and it seems certain that the rashness of Hasan Pasha—and bad relations between Loring and his chief—led to the foolish abandonment of the Egyptians' prepared position. Otherwise, the accounts differ widely. The Egyptians claimed, at worst, an indecisive battle followed by a pacific and leisurely withdrawal to the coast; the Negus was glad to make terms, and the disputed territories remained after all with the Khedive. The Ethiopian version gives circumstantial detail of an appalling slaughter of Egyptians, the capture

of the prince and his officers, their gross humiliation before the Negus and their subsequent ransom, with the bare escape (through the punished treachery of Ras Bariu) of a remnant of the forces to Massawa. The Egyptian version is certainly the more distorted.

The defeat of their arms was in fact very severe. They lost at least 4,000 killed, and twice that number of rifles. Prince Hasan was cut off, captured and released, and heavy payments were made to the Negus. A rabble of Egyptian survivors were thankful to reach the sea, and the Khedive, though he kept the Bogos area on payment, struck no further blow at the dominions of the Negus. The battle of Gura—hailed throughout Ethiopia with enthusiasm as a genuine national and religious victory—ended the Egyptian menace. Had the result been otherwise (as most would have foretold) the shock would certainly have been fatal to the emperor's throne, and possibly to the independence of his country.

### *3. Policy of John IV in Religion and Diplomacy*

The reign of John IV presents in one outstanding respect a contrast to those of his predecessors: its interests and events lay no longer behind the veil of Ethiopian obscurity, but were seen in the full light of day. His records are those of world events—the Napier Expedition, the Egyptian war, the Mahdist rising, the invasion by the Italians.

The years following his great victory of Gura showed both the qualities and the defects of the Tigraean Negus. His religious bigotry led him to insist on universal acceptance of the Coptic dogma peculiar to the Tigraeans, and to stop at no measures of cruel compulsion to enforce the conversion of Muslims, Jews, and pagans. His own leanings to mysticism almost led him to become himself a monk. He oppressed and dispersed the Catholic missions, rightly suspected of preferring Egyptian rule to his own, and insisted that his vassal Menelik should do no less. Yet he welcomed European travellers, aspired to modern roads and railways, employed foreign technicians and



engineers Acts of cruelty alternated with others of wisdom and mercy. He was chaste and pious, yet bequeathed his throne to a bastard.

His empire was, throughout his reign, uneasy and unsure, yet less so perhaps than any predecessor had found it. His internal power was strongly based on the loyalty of the Tigrat, held by bonds of family and personal devotion and proud of its new imperial position. With Menelik of Shoa his relations would have been worse but for his own preference for diplomacy over force, and Menelik's life-long prudence and moderation. John was content with a nominal suzerainty, cemented by a marriage between the families; and Menelik knew how to wait. The vassal received the great title of Negus (King), which was bestowed simultaneously on Ras Adal of Gojjam, with the precise motive of creating jealousy between them. Peace with Menelik was made in March 1878. It did not preclude separate advances by the powers of Europe to the kingdom of Shoa, which by its freedom from imperial cares and its series of conquests to the east and south (far outside the old historic Ethiopia) gained wealth and strength year by year, while the emperor could barely maintain his own.

The bloody defeat and humiliation of the Egyptians had settled nothing as between the two empires. Their forces remained in Keren and its districts, and their ally Ras Waldenkiel of Hamasien continued to raid across the Mareb into Tigrat and to defy his suzerain. Although, indeed, John was still not without authority north of the Mareb, and could deprive the Naib of all his highland fiefs in punishment for his Egyptian sympathies, Eritrea was for the five years before 1880, rather an Egyptian than an Ethiopian province. A peace-making mission to the Negus from the Khedive under 'Ali Bey in 1876 reached no conclusion. The Ethiopian deputation to Egypt in 1877, in search of a new Abuna, was arrested in Cairo until released by British intervention. In the same year Charles James Gordon, newly returned to the Sudan with the appointment of Governor-General, sent Mr. Winstanley to negotiate a settlement with the

Negus, but in vain. He himself visited Massawa, and bade Ras Waldenkiel stop his aggressions against the Tigrai as a preliminary to better relations.

In September 1879 (the year of Isma'il Pasha's deposition from his now bankrupt throne) Gordon at the emperor's suggestion again visited Massawa, and journeyed this time to Debra Tabor for a personal interview. The two statesmen again failed to agree; the rigid principles of Gordon and the claims of John could not be reconciled. The emperor claimed the evacuation of Bogos and the Anseba valley, Zula and the whole Dankali coast, with the payment of a war indemnity. Gordon returned to Gallabat *en route* for Khartum, but was arrested by Ethiopians and, treated with great discourtesy, was sent back to Massawa in December. Again John addressed himself to the powers of Europe; again they ignored his troubles. Meanwhile Gordon resigned his office, and Massawa early in 1880—like the Egyptian possessions of Berbera, Zeila, and Harrar farther south—was formed into a separate Pashalik. The Egyptian occupation of Keren district continued, and a few Europeans settled there on agricultural and wood-cutting concessions. But there was no security for life or property, and travellers judged harshly the impotence and meanness of Egyptian rule.

The career of Waldenkiel was nearly at an end. It had had the merit, at least, of stopping all disorder in the highlands save that of his own oppressive raids and exactions. But it had too long defied the emperor, and the defeat of imperial forces and the slaughter by Waldenkiel's own hand (on the site of the future Governor's Palace in Asmara) of their leader, Ras Bairu, could not rest unavenged. The emperor's most trusted officer, Ras Alula, was sent to Hamasien late in 1879 in the guise of conciliation; but, at a falsely cordial meeting which Waldenkiel credulously attended with a few followers, the rebel's arrest was carried out by a trick of supposed petitioners, and Alula sent him in chains to the royal court. He was there imprisoned, but escaped in 1890. His successor as Koraj of Eritrea was Ras Alula himself, who proved a strong and harsh but beneficent

ruler. Abandoning ill-famed Zazzega, he made his capital—and built his palace of two huts—at the tiny hamlet of Asmara near the edge of the escarpment. From here he kept the peace of his province and enforced justice. The territory breathed again after the long nightmare of civil war and the bloodthirsty reign of Waldenkiel.

But other and greater events were at hand: wholesale disorder in the Sudan and across the borders, and invasion from the sea.

#### 4. *The Italian Landing: Assab—Massawa*

The achievement by Italy of its national unity, soon accompanied by an expansive and competitive pride, coincided in historical period with the opening of the Suez Canal and a general reorientation of the interests and ambitions of the nations. Already Great Britain had occupied Aden in 1839, Perim in 1857; she was soon (1882) to acquire a dominating position in Egypt and from Berbera and Zeila to control the Gulf of Aden. The French occupations of Algiers and Tunis and the French-Somali village ports belong to the same epoch. Belgian and German nineteenth-century acquisitions elsewhere in Africa are part of the same movement of strategic and commercial expansion in the Continent.

The first moves of the Italian government were humble. The approach of Father Leone to Negusié in 1858 has been mentioned elsewhere. It was followed by a suggestion, by Father Stella of Keren, that Italy should administer his mission estates in the Barka valley; and by appeals by Father Sapeto not to miss opportunities of acquisition on the vital sea route. The final choice fell on a desert coastal tract adjoining the small village of Assab, just inside Bab al Mandab. Its purchase from the local Sultan by the Italian government (though nominally by the Rubatino Shipping Company) for 8,100 M.T. dollars was arranged by the good Father in November 1869. Further areas adjacent to Assab were bought, by the same intermediary, in 1879 and 1880 from the Sultan of Rahaita.

This modest acquisition, the subject of vain protests by the

Egyptian government (who claimed the entire coast), was followed by years of Italian exploration in the hinterland, associated with the names of Antinori, Martini, Chiarini, Cecchi, Antonelli, Giuletti, Matteucci, Vigoni, Bianchi. To the same period belong the travels of the Germans Rohlf's and Stecker, the Frenchmen Raffray, Soleillet, and Borelli, and the Spaniard de Sostén. A resident Italian representative appeared at Assab in 1881. In the same year an Italian party under Giuletti attempted to open a way from Beilul, on the same Dankali coast, through the Tigray to Eritrea. It was ambushed and destroyed.

Assab was now (1882) transferred from the Rubatino Co. to the Italian State. Its hinterland was further explored by Count Antonelli, who succeeded in negotiating a treaty with Menelik for safe passage to and from the Shoan markets. But another inland expedition from Assab under Bianchi, authorized by John IV to open a route to the Tigray, suffered the fate of Giuletti. Italian indignation knew no bounds. A detachment of their troops landed in January 1885 to occupy Assab and Beilul. Events had followed their inevitable course.

They did not stop here. The government of Italy had been watching with keenest interest the tragic events of the eastern Sudan, which could not but affect the Red Sea coast-line. Late in 1884 the Italian ambassador in London had asked Lord Granville what would be the British attitude to an Italian occupation of Zeila. The reply was one of indifference to such occupation of 'Zeila, Beilul, and Massawa', since these ports, no longer tenable by the Egyptians, would now revert to Turkey; the question was therefore one for Italian settlement with the Porte.

On the morning of 5 February 1885 an Italian squadron under Admiral Caimi dropped anchor off Massawa Island carrying 1,000 bersaglieri. Colonel Saletta landed and occupied strategic points. The Egyptian governor, 'Izzat Bey, yielded to force. The Italian flag was hoisted beside the Egyptian. A few weeks later Monkullo and Otumlo on the mainland were occupied. Protests from Turkey, being purely formal, died a natural death.

*5. The Infancy of Italian Africa*

Neither Egyptian nor British agreement to the landing could have been expected but for a new position which had arisen in the Nile valley during the preceding three years.

The rebellion of the Mahdi, Muhammad Ahmad, can be traced in some measure to a crisis of Muslim enthusiasm due to many causes, but far more to the universal misery created by Egyptian misgovernment, under which slave-trading on a gigantic scale had reduced to despair such population as was not yet exterminated. The Mahdi proclaimed his divine mission in May 1881, and this—while in Egypt the revolt of 'Arabi Pasha was suppressed and a new Egyptian government installed—was followed by the fall of El Obeid in January 1883, the spread of insurgence to the eastern Sudan in the autumn of that year, and the destruction of Hicks Pasha's army in November. The decision was reached to evacuate all Sudan except the coast. Gordon was entrusted with the evacuation, and returned to Khartum in February 1884. In the same month the Mahdi's forces in the Red Sea area routed those of Valentine Baker, captured Sinkat, and threatened Suakin. The situation here was saved, but all communication ceased with the interior where, after further successes—the capture of Berber and Gedaref—the Mahdi isolated and besieged Khartum. The British government organized a relief expedition under Sir Garnet Wolseley.

The plight of Egyptian garrisons in the eastern Sudan in the spring of 1884 had led to the dispatch, in May of that year, of a mission under Admiral Sir William Hewitt to arrange with the Negus for their evacuation through Eritrea. Hewitt succeeded; on 3 June 1884 a treaty was signed whereby, at long last, the Keren country was to be handed back to Ethiopia, and free transit for Ethiopian goods allowed 'under British protection' at Massawa. The emperor undertook to facilitate the retirement of the Kassala, Amidaib, and Senheit (Keren) garrisons.

To the watchful Italians this signified the abandonment by Egypt of all interest in Massawa, and the likelihood of its occupation by the Negus. This, and their simultaneous occupation of Beilul and Assab under pretext of the Bianchi murder, led to the landing at Massawa. It was received by the Negus with consternation, he had believed hitherto that the Italians were wholly disinterested. To allay his fears they dispatched, within a month of landing, a mission under Ferrari and Nerrazini to meet him at Amba Cera. The deputies promised to respect and even improve the terms of the Hewitt treaty; but the Negus was but half-satisfied, and his fears redoubled when he learnt within a few weeks of their occupation of Harkiko, Arafali, Zula, Meder (in the Bay of Anfila), Edd, and Hawakil Island. The taking of Zula reminded the Quai d'Orsay of the gift of this village by Negusié to Count Russel in 1860. They raised, without result, the usual diplomatic protest.

In the Sudan the British relief force had failed of its object. Khartum was stormed, and Gordon killed, 26 January 1885. The Mahdi died in June, and was succeeded by the Khafila, Abdullahi. The Egyptian garrisons of Gallabat and other posts were relieved by the Negus, as arranged with Hewitt; but in July Kassala, in spite of the efforts of Ras Alula, fell to the Khalifa, and the forces of 'Uthman (Osman) Digna dominated the Gash delta and threatened western Eritrea. A battle between Digna and the Ras was fought on 22 September. It was savagely contested, but indecisive. Ras Alula was wounded, but the Dervish army suffered the heavier losses. Their bands, nevertheless, ranged over the Eritrean lowlands; the chiefs, in terror, approached the Italians at Massawa—first the Habab, then the Beni Amir. The command at Massawa was assumed in November by General Gene, who completed the military occupation of the port, and sent 'Izzat Bey with the remnant of Egyptian troops to Suez. The local irregulars—bash busuqs—promptly took service with the Italians.

The Naib—indeed, representatives of both warring clans of the family—was no less willing to retain his functions under the

new flag, and became from the first a loyal servant of the Italian power. The Saho inland, though among the first to make contact with General Gene, gave up for many years nothing of their old way of life. Chiefs from the Hamasien and Akkele Guzai, who had pretences unsatisfied by Alula or quarrels with him or ambitions of whatever kind, sought audience with the Italian general. In these days were made those contacts to which was due the later rise of many an Eritrean from obscurity to power.

Meanwhile the rough treatment by Alula of Italian envoys—Pozzolini and Nerazzini—sent up-country to the Negus for further parleys, showed the bitter xenophobia of the truculent Ras of Eritrea. He proceeded to raid the tribes which, having made approaches to Italy, already claimed foreign 'protection'. The Negus himself appealed to Great Britain to restrain the Italian menace, and Mr. Harrison Smith was sent on an inconclusive mission to him. Smith passed in February 1886 by the village of Asmara, and saw Alula sitting in judgement.

To increase the fears of John IV, General Gene in September 1886 proceeded to the occupation of Sa'ati on the coastal plain twenty miles inland from Massawa, and of Wa twenty-five miles southward on the sea. These places were claimed (with whatever justice) by Ethiopia as her own. Ras Alula, fresh from a raid on the Habab, led his forces down the escarpment to Ghinda, bade the Italian general abandon Sa'ati, and took prisoners a party of Italian engineers journeying, at that moment, to the court of Ras Adal (the Negus Tacla Haimanot) in Gojjam. Late in January 1887 Alula surrounded and attacked the new fort at Sa'ati. The attack failed, but he cut to pieces, at the stream-bed crossing of Dogali, the relief column sent from Massawa. The blow was full of bitterness for the Italian public, unaccustomed to the surprises of colonial warfare. Sa'ati was abandoned, and General Gene ransomed the three engineers by the surrender to Alula of a consignment of fire-arms hitherto detained at Massawa. His weakness was condemned, and he yielded his place to General Saletta. The new commander fortified the outskirts of Massawa and awaited the arrival of the

strong expeditionary force, under General San Marzano, which the Italian government had dispatched. It arrived in the first weeks of 1888. Meanwhile a further attempt at mediation had been made, again in vain, by Great Britain at the request of Negus John. Mr. Gerald Porter was sent to him from Cairo in the closing weeks of 1887, but found him averse from all compromise. From Alula Mr. Porter had incivility and almost violence.

The orders of General San Marzano were to reoccupy Sa'ati. He did so with the utmost thoroughness, even constructing a railway to it from the port. It was defended by a strong fort and defence system. These confronted the emperor on his appearance, at the head of 80,000 men, a few weeks later, in April 1888. He demanded, again, the withdrawal of the invaders. They replied by asking for Ailet, Ghinda, and the whole low country. The armies faced each other for some weeks; then, to the boundless surprise of the Italians, the Ethiopian forces retired to the highlands. Urgent preoccupations elsewhere, and the increasing wastage of his forces before an impregnable position, decided John to abandon the campaign. The expeditionary force of San Marzano re-embarked, leaving General Antonio Baldissera, hitherto a brigade commander, in charge of the remaining Italian troops.

Italian diplomacy had not been idle. Count Antonelli had concluded, in October 1887, an agreement with the Negus Menelik of Shoa whereby the latter, receiving arms from Italy, should remain neutral in the war now inevitable between Italy and the King of Kings. The attitude of Menelik was, in the event, cautious and non-committal; neither the Italians nor John could be confident of his sincere support. The latter had entrusted his vassal with the defence of the western marches against the Dervish hordes of the Khalifa; but Menelik failed to stop their inrush in February 1888, their victory over the forces of Takla Haimanot, and their sack of Gondar itself. The counter-moves of Menelik against them provoked the further suspicions of John, who openly accused him of treachery.



Relations between Tigrai and Shoa were strained to the point of rupture, and by ill fortune the death of Ras Araia Selassie (only legitimate son of John, who had been married to Menelik's daughter) severed the last friendly link between their houses. Menelik turned again to Antonelli for arms and ammunition; the Count returned to Italy for instructions.

The position of John IV was critical. The Italians were before him, Menelik behind, the Dervish armies on his flank, while one province after another was turning to the king of Shoa, whose strength, from his great conquests in the south and from the practical goodwill of Italy, was ever increasing. But John had no time to deal with these. Pausing to ravage the homelands of Negus Takla Haimanot, he turned to meet the infidel invaders, and camped opposite to their forces at Gallabat, on the upper Atbara, on 10 March 1889. The battle seemed to be ending in a complete victory for his arms; but, in its last stages, he himself was mortally wounded. With his last breath he acknowledged his fatherhood of Mangasha, his brother's reputed son, and entrusted him and his royal claims to the most devoted servant of his house, Alula. His own body, abandoned in the general terror which followed his death, was seized by the Muslims and decapitated. The head was sent to the Khalifa.

### 6. *Ucciali*

The immediate proclamation of Menelik as King of Kings was a matter of course. He was beyond question the strongest power in Ethiopia, and the death of his suzerain found him at the head of an army of 100,000 men. His accession was acknowledged by all important chiefs of the empire, except Mangasha and Alula in the Tigrai.

In the probable struggle between the Tigrai and Shoa for the throne the attitude of Italy became all-important. Antonelli had returned from Rome in January 1889, with instructions from the Crispi government to conclude a treaty of friendship. Menelik was officially to cede lands on the Eritrean highlands,

and to send an embassy to Rome. He agreed to these proposals and, on his sudden elevation to the imperial throne, pressed for an early Italian move against his Tigraean rivals

(The withdrawal of John and Alula from Sa'ati was followed by a brief pause in Eritrea. General Baldissera was anxious—but always within the limits of his cautious prudence—to open the cool highlands to his forces before the summer heat. He sought, to this end, the help of some of the Eritrean leaders already at his disposal. Among these were Barakī and Sebhātu, sons of the Cantibai Bakhit of Carneshim; Gugsā, son of Hailu the former Zazzega governor; Batha Hagos, outstanding in the Akkele Guzai; Hadgembasa, outlaw son of Cantibai Ghilwet of Dembesan; Debbēb, rival of Batha Agos and notorious gang-leader of the northern Tigrāi; Abarra, who became a noted leader of irregulars until his treachery and flight; and the Balambaras Kafel, a Tigraean and bitter enemy of Alula. Of these, Debbēb and Kafel seemed the most suitable instruments, though no reliance was possible on the loyalty of either.

To Baldissera Keren appeared a more favourable first objective than Asmara; and to it he dispatched Kafel, to take possession in the name of the Italian government. He did so with complete success, and hoisted the flag of Italy on the Senheit fort in July 1888. Debbēb preferred for the moment the life of large-scale highwayman, and with his band dominated Akkele Guzai. Raiding tribes friendly to the Italians, he soon called for chastisement; but a column of four hundred native troops under Captain Cornacchia sent for a surprise attack on him near Saganeiti was betrayed, surrounded, and annihilated in August 1888.

Orders from Rome to the commander at Massawa continued to press for forward action. Debbēb, still at large, was allowed to make his submission to Baldissera and was next entrusted with the occupation of Asmara, defenceless in the absence of Alula. To Keren, where the 'government' of Kafel was anarchic and he himself believed to be treacherously in touch with Alula, was sent Major di Majo by a forced march up the Lebka valley. Kafel was captured and banished to Assab, Keren occupied by

an Italian garrison on 2 June 1889. The fate of Debbeb was little different; he visited the Tigrai to offer his traitorous services to Mangasha, and was there arrested and confined. Asmara was occupied by Italian troops on 3 August, and di Majo advanced to Gura. Alula retired into the Tigrai. Italian detachments were placed without opposition in key villages southward to the line of the Mareb and Belesa rivers.

This advance had, no doubt, a diplomatic as well as military object. The Treaty of Ucciali, signed by Menelik and Antonelli at that village on 2 May 1889, provided that the boundaries of Italian territory should be such as to include Arafah, Halai, Saganeiti, Asmara, Adi Nefas, and Adi Yohannes; that is, only a portion of the Hamasien, and little of Akkele Guzai. Article 17 of the treaty declared (in the Amharic version, which alone was signed) that the king of Ethiopia might use the government of Italy for conducting his foreign affairs. Menelik dispatched his cousin, the able and high-minded Ras Makonnen, to Italy, where on 1 October an additional clause was signed. It made the Italian recognition of Menelik's sovereignty more definite, and, not less so, that of the king of Italy over 'the Italian possessions in the Red Sea'. These were to be defined on the basis of 'present possessions', which, by that date, must mean the Mareb line, to which the Italians had thus hurriedly advanced.

The Treaty of Ucciali was communicated to the powers in October. The Italian relation to Ethiopia was represented as that of a protectorate, the 'might' of Article 17 being translated as 'shall'. Menelik was crowned emperor on 6 November. On 1 January 1890 a decree of the king of Italy created the colony of Eritrea, named from the Mare Erythraeum (Red Sea) of the Roman geographers.

## X

### ADUA

#### 1. *The Beginning of Dissension*

THE years following Uccialli exemplified, through courses which ended tragically, the exuberance and inexperience (and often the gallantry) of the Italian forces in their colony, and the endlessly divided councils and contradictory instructions of their government in Italy. The attitude of Menelik was, throughout, patient and unaggressive. His own position was, in the months following the treaty, insecure; the Tigrai was generally hostile to him, Gojjam unenthusiastic, the Dervish threat remained. These reasons and his own prudent and unprovocative diplomacy secured the Italians from danger from the Shoan power. But they did not secure Italy from adventures in intrigue and aggression by its own local commanders.

The domination of Mangasha and his lieutenant Alula in the Tigrai was soon questioned by a pretender, Sebhatu of Agamé, a descendant of Sabagadis. His forces joined those of Seyum, a commander sent by Menelik to set the Tigrai in order and reduce Mangasha to obedience. Seyum, twice defeated by Mangasha, was twice in 1889 refitted and returned to his task by the Italian command; and an Italian column, under Major di Majo, took the opportunity to press beyond Akkele Guzai and occupy Enticcio and Adua.

General Orero, who succeeded Baldissera late in 1889, had orders to support the authority of Menelik in the Tigrai. But he preferred an active policy, which should show Italy as true arbiter of Tigrai affairs. Ignoring all counter-advice, he sent Toselli with a detachment to Makallé and himself entered Adua amid enthusiasm; only, however, to leave it again with a garrison under di Majo, whose orders were to support Sebhatu as candidate for the Tigrai government.

The King of Kings, meanwhile, had failed to agree with

Count Antonelli on the southern boundary of Eritrea. He insisted on the northern alternative, that of Halai-Saganeiti-Shikelti. This, to Italian indignation, was accepted by Antonelli, and a convention signed in March 1890; but the Italian government refused to ratify it. Menelik, whose own presence in the Tigrai was now clearly necessary, moved to Makallé. Mangasha formally submitted, and was invested with the government of the western area of a partitioned Tigrai; Sebhatu remained a fugitive rebel. General Orero, persuaded that close understanding with Mangasha offered better security to the colony than the distant promises of Menelik, secretly addressed the former. Mangasha with a gesture of great correctness sent the letters to his emperor. Orero was recalled.

The famous controversy on Article 17 of the Ucciali treaty was now developing in all its bitterness. Between the Italian and Ethiopian conception—between the ‘may use’ and the ‘shall use’ as applied to Ethiopian relations with the Italian Foreign Office—there could be no compromise. (The Ethiopian view has in fact been accepted as correct by many or most Italian non-Fascist historians.) Menelik addressed King Umberto. He asked that a corrected version of the treaty be notified to the powers of Europe, and for a delimitation of the frontier along the northern line. The latter was in fact agreed, with Rome’s consent, between him and Antonelli and the Italian local military command early in 1891; but the agreement never became effective, nor did Italian forces withdraw to it. Article 17, it was suggested, should be modified after expiry of the present five-year life of the treaty of Ucciali.

In the Tigrai unrest and intrigue continued. Sebhatu again attempted to gain power, raided Akkele Guzai, was counter-attacked by Italian forces. Debbab escaped from captivity and entered the lists. He was defeated and killed. Ras Alula himself, supported by the escaped captive Waldenkiel, broke for a time away from his prince. But the turmoil of faction and violence ended with the supremacy of Ras Mangasha. His emergence emphasized the alternative policies between which

Italy seemed unable to decide: whole-hearted support of Menelik—that is, loyalty to their own treaty and recognition of his sovereignty, or support of Mangasha as independent ruler of the Tigrai in the hope of a more generous frontier to be granted by him as the price of their backing. Agreement with Mangasha was reached on this basis in December 1891. General Gandolfi (in command as military and civil governor since June 1890) met Mangasha, who addressed King Umberto by letter on the happy results of the agreement, and signed himself frankly as an independent monarch. The simultaneous negotiations by Dr. Traversi with Menelik could, in these circumstances, do nothing but fail, and fail they did. The King of Kings bade his vassal attend him at Borumeda. He was disobeyed.

## 2. *Dervishes and Rebels*

In the infant colony the first steps towards administration were being taken. The Sa'ati railway was not extended, but the beginnings of roads appeared. Houses for Italian officers and barracks for their troops were erected at Asmara, Keren, and on the southward roads by Saganeiti and Adi Ugri. Tribal and village contacts increased, district headmen were appointed or confirmed. The translated works of Münzinger were the Bible of the new administrators who—each with his black lady and native household—were making homes in Africa.

At Rome the lines of development of the colony were discussed by colonial enthusiasts and by the large party—the treasury prominent in it—who viewed the whole adventure with suspicion. This division in Italian opinion, reflected by the new policy proclaimed by each successive government, was not the only embarrassment of the commanders in the field. There was, no less, the failure at home to realize that results in warlike penetration are conditioned by the means made available. Even Crispi asked his generals for successes not achievable with the resources which a poor and hesitant government could offer.

To clarify such matters a commission of inquiry was sent to Eritrea, late in 1891, under Senator Borghini. The future and greatest governor of Eritrea, Martini, was a member. The commission reported favourably. Italian immigration, which lies deep in all Italian colonial conceptions, could be arranged; the present (Mareb) frontier must be maintained; and a policy of 'friendship to neighbours' must be adopted. Here, therefore, was support for the Mangasha policy. General Gandolfi was removed: Baratieri early in 1892 took his place.

To the embarrassment of conflicting instructions, and intrigues among his own staff, and Tigrai politics, were added for the governor those of his uneasy western border. The Diglal had made unconditional submission to the Italians in 1890, a step infuriating to the religious fervour of the Dervishes. These carried their arms deep into Bani Amir country, raided and destroyed the standing camp or 'dega' of the Diglal, who was himself slain. But on their return march in June 1890, laden with booty, an Italian detachment from Keren under Captain di Fara attacked them and, after an encounter of extraordinary ferocity, avenged the protégés of the Italian flag. There followed discussions between Great Britain and Italy about the future Sudan-Eritrean boundary in this area. At a meeting in Naples in 1891 the two nations gave each other liberty to pursue their enemies wherever military exigencies might call them. Italian forces might even occupy Kassala in such circumstances, but with the obligation to restore it to Egypt when operations were concluded.

The peace produced on the Taka frontier by the victory of di Fara was short-lived. A Dervish raid from Kassala in June 1892 was repelled with loss by the garrison of Agordat. Late in 1893 rumours reached Keren of a more important westward advance, reported to aim at Massawa itself, by the fanatical enemy. Italian forces hurried to meet the threat. They dispersed it in a successful engagement on 23 December, in the course of which the Dervish leader, the Amir Ahmad 'Ali, was killed.

But General Baratieri was not satisfied. In early 1894 he mustered forces at Agordat, advanced to Sabderat on the present frontier, and by a sudden stroke entered and occupied Kassala itself. A garrison was installed, and Baratieri withdrew.

It was suggested in Italian circles that the aggression of the Dervishes was not unconnected with Ethiopian intrigue—with the desire, perhaps, of Mangasha to be admitted as an Italian ally against them. It is more probable that the Ras's hand is to be seen in another uprising—that of Batha Ilagos, the Akkele Guzai chief who had been one of Italy's first supporters in Eritrea. Rumours that the Italians had agreed with Menelik to abandon Akkele Guzai (and with it his own district), and fears of land-expropriation on behalf of Italian colonists, drove him to arms against the occupying power. Perhaps Mangasha, certainly Menelik, were privy to his rebellion. In December 1894 he defied the Italians, seized the Residente of Saganeiti, and called on all Eritrea to drive out the foreigners. But the rebellion was easily suppressed. Toselli descended upon the rebel, who was killed in the first skirmish. His brother Singal fled to Mangasha.

### 3. *Adua and after*

In the Tigrai and in Shoa the Italian policy of insincerity and occasional *volte-face* was bringing its own rewards. Disagreeing with Menelik, they released to him a rich cargo of fire-arms from Assab. Intriguing with Mangasha, they refused him the arms for which he asked. Quibbling with the King of Kings, whose sole authority in Ethiopia they had acknowledged, they treated his vassal as independent of him. The end was to disgust both sovereign and Ras. Mangasha, whose domestic power in the Tigrai ebbed and flowed, had at last determined (all unknown to the Italians) to make terms with Menelik. In May 1893 he swore allegiance at Makallé while continuing his protestations of friendship towards Italy. Baratieri accepted them, but refused the embarrassment of a personal meeting. Visiting Rome, he converted the Giolitti government to his policy of Tigrai



support; within a few weeks it was reversed on a change of government. The general was forced, again, to decline the advances of Mangasha, and the Ras again visited his emperor at the new capital, Addis Abeba. An Italian envoy, Colonel Piano, was sent by the Crispi government to make yet one more attempt to solve the problems of Article 17. Menelik had meanwhile solved them in his own way, by a formal notice to the powers in February 1893 that the treaty of Uccialli would not be renewed after its lapse in May 1894. Colonel Piano failed to move him. He and Traversi left Addis Abeba. Relations were broken off. Crispi became a convert to the Tigrai policy; but for it, and for any other policy save one of appeasing Menelik, it was now too late. The stage was set for the final campaign of Adua.

Ras Mangasha, invited by the Italian command to hand over Singal and other rebel leaders, temporized; that is, refused. Baratieri, on 26 December 1894, advanced into the Tigrai and entered Adua. The Ras declined battle and retired, then turned to threaten the Italian flank. Baratieri withdrew to Adi Ugri, then eastward to Coatit. In a first engagement on 18 January near that village Mangasha was worsted, and in a second, two days later near Senafé, he was severely defeated and pursued. His own tent and his revealing secret correspondence were captured.

These petty victories filled Italy with enthusiasm. Crispi telegraphed 'The Tigrai lies open before you'. But a more sober mood quickly followed. Finance was provided with a sparing hand. Crispi himself wished, on second thoughts, to restrain the advance which he had urged.

But, on the spot, councils of aggression prevailed. A chief of Agamé, Hagos Tafari, offered himself as instrument for further advance. He was armed and sent to occupy Adigrat for the Italians. Mangasha wrote offering peace and friendship; he was bidden to disarm and disperse his forces. He moved, instead, towards Adigrat. Baratieri preceded him, and annexed Agamé to Eritrea. A battalion was left as garrison, and another

at Adua and Axum, which he occupied in the first week of April 1895. These moves made an Ethiopian war inevitable. Rome forbade further advance, and urged the abandonment of Axum and Adua; the Budget would support no further adventures. Baratieri hastened to Rome to explain. He was permitted to hold his conquests, and allowed further, but limited, funds. He returned to Eritrea in September 1895.

Menelik had already proclaimed a general mobilization against an enemy 'burrowing in our earth like a mole'. But he allowed the Italian forces unopposed to complete the occupation of the Tigray, where Toselli was left with a battalion at Makallé and another stationed on the heights of Fremona over Adua. Baratieri with his main forces returned to Eritrea, and unwisely dismissed many of his irregulars.

But the King of Kings had other ideas. He continued to advance and sent Ras Makonnen ahead of him. Baratieri, realizing too late the seriousness of the threat, ordered Toselli to reconnoitre in force beyond Amba Alagi, and learnt from him that imposing forces were moving up. Toselli's force was cut off, surrounded, and cut to pieces. General Arimondi, supporting him from the rear with a brigade, barely escaped a similar fate. He retired successfully to Makallé, left a battalion there under Major Galliano, and fell back to the line of Adigrat. The emperor's forces continued to advance northwards.

Baratieri, based on Adigrat, faced serious odds. His forces had been increased by contingents from Italy and by local levies to 24,000 men, including 14,000 Italians; but the supply arrangements were primitive and wholly inadequate.

On 1 January 1896 Makallé was surrounded and besieged. After three weeks of gallant but hopeless resistance, and with its only well in enemy hands, it surrendered on terms which included a payment of 1,000,000 M.T. dollars. All survivors marched out, but were 'escorted' northward by the overwhelming body of their enemies. They were released only when Menelik had safely taken up his intended positions. These indicated his intention to invade Eritrea to which, indeed, Alula

urged him. Baratieri moved on 3 February to Mai Gabata in Enticchio. The two armies were now a bare six miles apart.

Negotiations between the king and the Italian commander, through his staff officer Major Salsa, continued. Baratieri was willing enough to find a way of deliverance from his perilous position. But the insoluble difficulty was that of an indemnity—and that, as usual, of the frontier line. After a fortnight, talks were broken off. Eritrean troops and chiefs' contingents began to melt away, as Menelik's threats of land confiscation from all traitors had their effect. One Italian unit after another had to be sent back to guard the unsure communications. Menelik moved to the Adua depression, sending advanced troops to the Mareb. This forced Baratieri to detach another battalion for Adi Quala.

From Rome came first a refusal of all negotiations with a still triumphant enemy, then a sneer at Baratieri's slow caution. The public wanted victories, and at once! Meanwhile a further expeditionary force of 20,000 men was prepared; but it was to arrive too late.

General Baratieri held a council of war on 28 February. Supplies were running dangerously low, the enemy was threatening the colony with vastly superior forces. The decision was to attack. The commander ordered a forward move to the eastern fringe of the Adua hollow. Sketch-maps, full of inaccuracies, were distributed.

The result was the battle of Adua. On 1 March fourteen thousand Italians were attacked, while still groping for new positions, by an enemy eight times greater in numbers; an enemy familiar with the ground, whose artillery was little inferior to the Italian, and whose rifles were five times as numerous. The plans of Baratieri depended upon synchronized movement to defined positions by each of his brigades. But the brigades of Albertone and Arimondi clashed, some units advanced far beyond the appointed line. The confused topography was never mastered, all synchronization went awry, communication between brigades, and of these to the com-



*View of the side of the canyon looking toward the head of the river.*



mander, broke down. The strong and savage tide of the Ethiopian army swept over all. The brigades of Albertone, Arimondi, Dabormida, and Ellena were, one after the other, overwhelmed and almost destroyed in spite of bitter and gallant resistance. Dabormida and Arimondi were killed, Albertone a prisoner. Over 6,000 Italians were killed, 1,750 prisoners taken, and many hundreds wounded. Though Ethiopian losses were even higher, Adua was a crushing defeat for Italian arms and settled the fate, for forty years, of their African ambitions. The wretched remnants of the army mustered at Adi Caieh.

General Baldissera arrived at Massawa three days after the battle. He had been sent from Rome, but too late, to relieve Baratieri of his command. He took immediate steps to retrieve the position. Menelik had entered Eritrea and seized the fort of Adi Ugri; Adigrat was blockaded, and Major Pristiani forced to capitulate. Baldissera evacuated Adi Caieh and Saganciti, and visualized a defence line as far back as Ghinda. But the emperor, surprisingly, did no more to pursue his advantage. He retired towards his own country of Shoa, leaving Mangasha and Alula in command.

The Dervishes meanwhile were active in the Kassala neighbourhood, fiercely but unsuccessfully attacked the post at Sabderat, and surrounded Kassala itself. It was relieved by Colonel Stevani with a brigade, who strengthened it and its outposts before withdrawing.

The strong reinforcements ordered in Italy some weeks before now reached Massawa. A bare month after Adua, Baldissera commanded an army of 40,000 men, 60 cannon, and better transport and supplies than ever before; and it is interesting to observe how easily Italian forces could then have invaded Ethiopia, and with fair prospects of complete success.

But their government could face no more. Crispi fell, and peace at any price was the demand. Menelik still held the Italian prisoners, except those few whom Baldissera had compelled Mangasha to hand over. A mission of General Valles and Dr. Nerazzini was sent from Italy to Addis Abeba, and

immediately arranged terms. The new treaty, dated 26 October 1896, provided for peace and friendship, the abrogation of the treaty of Ucciali, the complete independence of Ethiopia and (surprisingly enough) a frontier to be based after all on the Mareb-Belesa-Muna river line. The Italian prisoners were released, in excellent condition, and embarked at Zeila. General Baldissera returned to Italy in January 1897. General Baratieri was found, by court martial at Asmara, unfit to command.

Kassala was, in accordance with the agreement of 1890, restored to Colonel Parsons of the Egyptian army on 19 December 1897. The Dervish threat was by now over; the battle of Omdurman (Umm Durman) less than a year distant.

The first civil governor of Eritrea was appointed in 1898.

#### 4. *Tigrai and Ethiopia, 1900-35*

While the Italian colonizers, within their frontiers at last secure and agreed, could proceed with the administration of Eritrea, the empire of Ethiopia pursued for forty years its separate courses. These lie outside the scope of the present work, and must be dismissed in a few lines.

The Tigrai, henceforth nearly always divided for administration into a number of districts, did not again achieve its formidable unity. Nevertheless, it remained conscious of its separateness, and hostile—sometimes with a bitter and active, sometimes with a dull smouldering, resentment—against the rule of the Shoans in Addis Abeba. Onwards from the rebellion of Ras Mangasha in 1898, revolt or mere disobedience were habitual. At no time did the emperor show his consciousness of the need for special care, wise conciliation, for this turbulent province with its separate language and traditions, its virile independence which the imperial crown had so lately rewarded.

The rest of Ethiopia, under the paternal rule of Menelik, made some progress towards peace and development in the remaining thirteen years of his reign. His prestige and judgement held the warring Rases in check, while powerless to remove the deep-seated causes of disunion and insurgence—the arrogant

passion for local independence, distrust and resentment of a central government, mutual jealousy, and endless intrigue. But at least, for better or worse, the country was to some extent opened up, and first acquaintance made with new standards both of government and of life.

Menelik was succeeded in 1913 by his worthless grandson Lij Yasu. This dissolute youth offended his own subjects by his leanings to Islam, and the allies by his pro-German sympathy. He was succeeded by his aunt the Empress Zauditu, in 1916, with Ras Tafari (son of Menelik's loyal servant and cousin, Ras Makonnen) as effective regent. The latter ascended the throne in 1930, as the Emperor Haile Selassie I. He had in fact reigned already for fourteen years, and remained in power until driven from his country in 1935 by the Italian armies, to be restored by British arms in 1941.

The forty years following the battle of Adua saw great changes in Ethiopia. They witnessed the first attempts (still continuing) at a modern administration of the empire: the attempt to step at a stride from the Dark Ages into the twentieth century. Such efforts may well be applauded, and the excellent intentions of the present emperor—patriotic, intelligent, enlightened—are beyond question. But the historian of Eritrea must admit that any field within which these efforts may have proved effective has not included those regions of northern Ethiopia which are of especial interest to Eritrea. The Tigray is still wild and unruly, a stranger to modern ways, unchanged in its medieval ignorances. It would, nevertheless—and however cautiously and suspiciously—welcome progress and assistance; but only from a hand which would arouse no ancient antipathies.



## XI

### THE ITALIAN ADMINISTRATION

#### 1. *General*

THE modern territory of Eritrea is the creation of the Italian occupation. The half-century of Italian rule—obviously and profoundly differing from any previous régime, as Africa from Europe and the Middle Ages from to-day—gave it an entity and boundaries, with an administrative system which (whatever its shortcomings) has become habitual; a conception of tranquillity and security never before imagined, but now taken for granted; daily contacts with the modern and outside world; and a material equipment and modern services far ahead of usual colonial standards.

The policy of the Italian government in their earliest colony was, firstly, to secure and organize it; secondly, to develop it for the occupation of a European population; thirdly, to encourage its natural (never its manufactured) production—agricultural, animal, mineral—and encourage it to absorb the exports of Italy; fourthly, to equip it as a base for further African conquest.

The administrative machine intended to carry out this policy grew, at first slowly but with growing momentum in later Fascist times, heavy and complicated. The governor in his palace—at Massawa until 1900, thereafter at Asmara—his staff and entourage, his secretariat, courts, and departments, sections and services; a numerous garrison of all arms and a hundred various uniforms; *commissari* and *residenti* throughout the territory, with ill-paid Italians of every grade in every humblest post; all these produced an administration of high paper efficiency, meticulously thorough, minutely organized. A first *ordinamento* for the colony was issued in 1903, a final edition in 1933. Legislation was copious and elaborate. The achievement of a balanced budget was slow and difficult; it was first accomplished, according to official figures, in 1927/28; but an analysis of these

accounts would reveal that the equilibrium was unreal; Eritrea could not but be a financial loss under an Italian colonial régime.

Best known of the governors was Martini, who held the post for the nine years from 1898 and can claim to be the father of the colony. Others of high repute were Salvaggio-Raggi, Di Martino, and Cerrina-Ferroni. Dr Gasparini, the first governor under Fascism, was tireless in cross-country journeying, and later in retirement developed the only irrigated estate in the colony. Later came Zoli (author of Ethiopian histories), Astuto dei Lucchesi, and Daodiace, who was later Deputy-Governor of Italian East Africa. Next in precedence to the governor came the general commanding the troops, and then the secretary-general. All these were Excellencies.

Criticisms commonly brought against Italian officialdom are not wholly just. Standards were low in some departments (the prisons, for instance, and town sanitation), but the reverse in engineering and the technical services; corruption was common among the middle and lower-grade functionaries (and by no means unknown higher up), but many officials were of high integrity. Hours of work were short, the siesta universal, local languages unlearned, outstation touring unpopular—but hard work was no rarity, and officials are remembered (or indeed are still at work) whose contacts and studies among the people were constant and valuable. Monographs of great merit were published and many officers enjoyed a local popularity based on friendship however unequal. They were, in general, defects of the administration that its officers were liable to early transfer elsewhere, and had the less incentive to specialize on local interests; were (in latter days) liable to promotion or disgrace for 'political' reasons; and were victims of too bureaucratic, too little elastic a conception of administration.

The boundaries of Eritrea with the Sudan and with Ethiopia were in detail delimited, apart from the main agreements of Italy with both neighbours in the nineties, by a series of amicable conventions in 1901 (boundary with the Sudan), 1902 (Gash-

Setit addition and boundary), and 1908 (partition of the Danakil). Relations with the Sudan were always cordial, and with Ethiopia were disturbed only by petty or normal frontier episodes until the events of 1935. Many Ethiopian officials and princes passed through Eritrea and were entertained at the palace in Asmara, while the governor attended on state occasions at the Ethiopian court. The king of Italy once visited Eritrea, in 1932, ministers and generals frequently, Mussolini never. The Duke of Aosta, while viceroy from 1938 to 1941, maintained a villa at Asmara, though living normally at Addis Abeba.

## 2. *Native Administration*

The native world of Eritrea, which never opposed the occupation by force, was on the whole treated by the administration with sympathy and goodwill. Taxation was always light, justice carefully administered, the never-ending land disputes settled or postponed, security generally maintained. Native land rights (after the first sweeping but not unjustified abolition of ancient freehold estates) were safeguarded, and not seriously threatened—in clear contrast to Cyrenaica—by Italian settlement on the land. Indeed, it was sadly discovered (by the early fiasco of the Godofellassi settlement, and others) that local agriculture could not, in spite of the efforts of new-comers' enthusiasm, be made to support a European immigration. Direct employment was given to thousands of Eritreans in the police, in the many locally recruited regiments (some of which served creditably in Libya), and on public works. Their loyalty was fostered by titles, grades, and uniforms. Churches and mosques were built. The native share in the benefit of public services was substantial: in the ubiquitous medical services, the inoculation of cattle, the planting of trees and introduction of new crop cultures, the amenities of cities.

But there were defects. The increase in native population was rapid. Martini, first governor, reported his subjects in 1900 as 330,000. In 1928 a rough census revealed 510,000. In 1941 there were 760,000 in the same area. Little at first, but rigorously in

Fascist days of 'race purity', the colour-bar was enforced; natives were reminded, specifically and everywhere, of their inferiority in their own country. The municipalities excluded them from all participation. In the central government hierarchy they had no part and were, after fifty years, no nearer to acquiring any; they could at best aspire to be low-paid clerks or orderlies. Of advance or training towards participation in government, or of administrative scheme which could lead to it, there was at no time a trace. There were to be, in perpetuity, rulers and the passive ruled. Meanwhile, native schools were few and poor.

In their administration of the Coptic highlands, the Italians tried at first to use such personalities as appeared already dominant in their own areas and willing to serve. But one by one these proved a failure; and not uncommonly it was thought wise to remove the head of an active clan-group, rather than risk security by supporting him as governor in the new régime. The result was a lack of any authority intermediate between the Chikka or village head and the government itself. To fill the gap, the *commissari* proceeded to the formation of new districts, sometimes wholly artificial, sometimes following the old districts based on enda kinship; and to the appointment of new salaried chiefs (*Meslenie*) to govern them for the Administration. These districts, so governed by their natural heads—or by favoured townsmen, or outsiders from other districts, or ex-soldiers thus rewarded for past services—were, after forty years of minor change and fragmentation and regrouping, those which the colonial government bequeathed to its successor.

In the tribal areas—that is, all Eritrea save the highlands—the District was unknown, the tribe the unit of government recognition. Here the Italians inevitably accepted the plain facts of tribal grouping, both social and geographic; they had merely to recognize, to grade, to formalize the results of centuries of evolution, as these had already been accepted by the Naib along the coast, by the local governor of Akkele Guzai for the Saho country, by Münzinger at Keren, by the Pasha at Kassala for the Bani Amir and the Diglal's hierarchy. Closely on the basis

of these, the status of each tribe and section was determined, the headman accorded his rank and salary and charged with his responsibilities. The Dankali and Samhar tribes and the Dahlak islanders were grouped in the division of Bassopiano Orientale, under Massawa; under Akkele Guzai, the Saho with a corridor across Massawa territory to the sea; under Keren, the Bait Asghedé tribes, the Ad Shaikh, and the now Muslim tribes in the mountains north of the Hamasien plateau; under Keren also a small enclave of Coptic villages which now form the 'Abysinian Districts' of that division. The western division of Bassopiano Occidentale, with head-quarters at Agordat, included all the Bani Amir sections (except those in the Sudan) and the Barea and the Kunama, and some small pockets of alien folk not yet absorbed.

In Appendix A is to be found the list of divisions and districts into which the Italian administration divided Eritrea; divisions which, in general, followed the traditional or natural areas already familiar.

#### 4. *The Development of Modern Conditions*

On the European side of the administration a distinction is to be drawn between the relatively moderate speed of progress and development in the years before, and those during and after, the Ethiopian war of 1935. In the earlier and quieter period a marked pause in activity occurred during the Great War, and during the campaigns in Libya from 1919 to 1929. The year 1935 marked, for many a comfortable colonial resident, the end of the old régime, and the beginning of one new and uncongenial. The distinction between pre- and post-Fascist times, with all their differences in tone and outlook, in ideals and methods, dates from ten years earlier; nor is there any feature of colonial administration or society which was not healthier and simpler in the earlier of these periods, before the vulgar bombast, the lowering of moral standards, the corruption and intrigues of the Mussolini period.

The survey of administrative achievement now following must, however, ignore these stages, and deal only with the finished results.

The first care of the administration was to provide the territory with roads, which year by year (and especially after 1934) developed into the superb highway system of the latest period; and with a railway, astonishing as an engineering feat, but never justified save for military purposes. It was constructed as far as Sa'ati in 1887, continued to Ghinda seventeen years later, and reached Asmara in 1909. The Keren line was begun in 1910, finished in 1922, and the Keren-Agordat section, surprisingly, two years earlier. The Massawa-Asmara section is of 122 km., Asmara-Keren of 104, Keren-Agordat of 86

Internally, then, communications of every sort—railway, roads, telegraphs, posts—reached the highest standard, while for the link with Italy subsidized steamships and the paistatal airline of Ala Littoria provided excellent if uneconomic services. To protect these in Eritrea a formidable garrison of colonial troops under Italian officers was maintained, with a lavish background of barracks, stores, workshops, and transport; the crack all-Italian Carabinieri Reali; the Italian African Police (P.A.I.), formed in Fascist days from local as well as European elements, and deadly rival of the CC.RR.; and a horde of uniformed *commissariato*, municipal, market, public health, and other guards. Public tranquillity was, by these means, satisfactorily if expensively maintained.

For the education of Italian children and the healing of the sick, arrangements were made by the Administration—sometimes with missionary help, since missions were early and widely established—to standards little inferior to those of Italy itself. Medical and veterinary services in particular were highly developed. An opera house, a museum, a government library, many cinemas, a flourishing local press, testified to the government's care for cultural things, and offered easy weapons to incoming Fascism. The Catholic Church was well represented under an Italian, and later also an Eritrean, bishop.

Urban development, linked by the new means of communication, transformed the territory into an easy and agreeable 'white man's country'. Eritrea had in 1890 no towns whatsoever, save the shabby jumble of huts that was Massawa. Fifty years later Asmara, with 40,000 European and 60,000 or more native inhabitants, was among the leading cities of Africa, with modern services, European streets and gardens, cathedral and churches, hospitals and workshops, cafés and hotels, banks and offices; Massawa (with 1,000 Europeans, 9,000 natives) was a fully equipped port and naval base, with warehouses and wharves, full quayside equipment, causeways rebuilt, sidings, European dwellings and services, hotels, and all in spite of a disastrous earthquake in 1921, and in spite of the much-resented creation and rivalry of Port Sudan; Decameré was a mushroom city of shops and workshops with 5,000 Europeans and a few natives. Keren, no more than a fort and mission-station at the occupation, became a gracious and green hill-surrounded town of 10,000 people, of whom 1,000 were Italians. The names familiar in previous centuries were heard no more. Debarua shrank to nothing, Zazzega remained a plateau village, Harkiko failed to expand. But busy new townships sprang up, a handful of European residents in each. Ghinda, Embatkalla, and Nefasit on the eastern slopes, were by-products of the railway. Saganeti, Adi Caieh, Senafé were and are the administrative centres in Akkele Guzai, and lie on the trunk road to Dessie and the Ethiopian capital; Adi Ugri and Adi Quala are those of Sarae, and lie on the Gondar road. In the Bassopiano Occidentale, on the main road to the Sudan, Agordat was enlarged from village to town, Barentu and Tessenei arose from nothing. At all these were found, at the close of the period, European dwellings, services of electricity and water, a hospital or dispensary, a police station and post office. Assab, where Ethiopian trade was granted free transport in 1928, was under intensive development as a port and entrepôt at the close of this period, and with its great inland route to Dessie was destined, perhaps, to supersede Massawa.

Towards increasing the production of the territory the Italian administrators did their best. Government experimental farms, a few score of small European land concessions, the latter-day and efficient (Fascist) Forest Militia, all contributed something to mitigate the chronic insufficiency of local foodstuffs, but not much; importation of wheat, coffee, tea, sugar, vegetable oil remained (and remains) necessary. The Italian land concessionaires founded pleasant homesteads, but could not grow rich. Controlled irrigation from the Gash was begun in 1915, and the distribution of its waters was the subject of an agreement with the Sudan in 1925. Cotton cultivation on this estate rose to some 7,000 acres, and the produce was exported. A cement factory at Massawa exported its products, as did (largely to Japan) the salt factories of Massawa and of Assab. Hides and skins found some market in Italy, and more in America. Mineral production was encouraged, and exhaustive researches carried out; but, as a later page will show, no resources of great significance were discovered.

In the mineral world, and in successive other industries, free enterprise was superseded, late in the period, by parastatal monopolistic companies, each the chosen instrument of the Fascist government in its own field: for minerals, for salt, water-supply, electricity, and many more. These, more than the administration itself, were able through their political influence—or possibly were instructed—to ignore the rigid canons of economics, to spend freely and employ generously.

The territory showed always an adverse trade balance; the rapid increase of both exports and imports (including goods in transit to and from Ethiopia and the Sudan) could never conceal this, nor indicate a hope of future self-sufficiency.

#### 4. *The Invasion of Ethiopia*

While the politics and achievements described above were being carried out there occurred (and greatly expedited many of them) an event profoundly important to Eritrea: the invasion and conquest of Ethiopia.

It is not possible here to write of the international implications



of this act which, before, during, and after it were of the most significant. Nor need its place in the general history of Italy be considered, and still less the course of its military operations. It belonged, as the original craving for African empire and the bitterness of remembered Adua clearly show, rather to Italian than to specifically Fascist policy; and many strands of Italian thought, as well as years of mental as well as physical preparation, combined to make such an act probable or inevitable, apart from the imperial ambitions of a dictator. In the event, it was in principle decided on at the end of the third decade of the century; and the sequence of treaties, League of Nations proceedings, complaints, and episodes was timed and arranged for the chosen moment. Ethiopia was to be conquered by force of arms, the monarchy and all independence destroyed, a Fascist empire created. To the perfection of these plans 1934 was devoted.

The physical preparations in Eritrea (the greater of the two obvious bases for the campaign) occupied the first three-quarters of 1935. General de Bono landed at Massawa on 16 January. These were months of tremendous effort, worthy of a nobler cause. More than 50,000 Italian labourers were brought to Eritrea, including dock-workers, roadmen, constructors, mechanics, and common labourers. Besides regular formations, three militia 'Blackshirt' divisions disembarked and concentrated, while native recruitment and training tripled. The Massawa port was vastly enlarged, improved, equipped. The throughput rose from 100 to 1,500 tons a day. On a single day forty steamers were seen in port. Railway traffic increased fivefold, new rolling-stock was brought into use. An aerial rope-way, the longest in the world, was constructed from Massawa to a suburb of Asmara, with a dozen power-stations and a throughput of some 500 tons a day. The Massawa-Asmara highway, and those leading into Ethiopia, were remade and rebridged. A great fleet of transport vehicles, with workshops and thousands of mechanics for their service, plied from depot to depot along the roads. Transport animals were in use in tens of thousands. Supplies for both the civil

and the military Italian armies were on a lavish scale, and vast reserves of stores and of munitions were accumulated. Airports, especially that of Gura, were enlarged and re-equipped.

The aspect of Eritrea was transformed. The sleepy and pleasant colony was no more. The capital was, perforce, developed at an unnatural speed. The small red-roofed and tranquil town, familiar to many visitors, became a modern city overnight. Its European population rose from 3,500 to 50,000; and if the new building was largely temporary and unsubstantial, and public services inadequate to the new requirements, these were tasks for the long imperial future.

De Bono's forces crossed the March into Ethiopia on 3 October 1935. He was superseded in command by Marshal Badoglio on 16 November. Addis Abeba was entered, and the Empire proclaimed, on 5 May 1936.

Apart from the revolution in its local society and in atmosphere, Eritrea had now lost its last possibility of economic health. Many thousands of the Italian labourers and mechanics, and of the disbanded Blackshirts, stayed on in the colony. Others joined them from Italy; many of the lowest type were encouraged to leave their country for overseas. The aftermath of the war and further roadmaking and city-building provided employment for perhaps two further years. Thereafter, the unemployment or hopelessly uneconomic employment of these unwanted thousands became a problem of growing seriousness, while their makeshift housing, and strain upon public services not yet modernized, were grave preoccupations for their governor.

The latter had, with the appointment of a viceroy for Italian East Africa, become the head of one of the six provinces of the new Empire; the others were Amhara, Shoa, Harrar, Galla-Sidama, and Somalia.

A decree of June 1936 prescribed the new status of Eritrea, the powers of its governor and judiciary, and its revised boundaries. These were extended southwards to include the entire Tigray, with all the Tigrinya-speaking folk (except for the addition in 1939 of the Wolkait district, south of the Kunama), as

well as some Galla and Dankali districts. The new governorate was nearly double the old colony in size as in population. The *commissariati* newly included are mentioned in Appendix A. The new frontiers of Eritrea held the field from 1936 to 1941, with the one major addition of the Wolkait. They recognized, at least, what the Mareb frontier—that of before 1936, and since 1941—had ignored, the essential unity of the Tigraeans.

With its record of well-maintained security and of reasonably humane and tolerant (but politically static) native administration; with outstanding achievements in the material world of modern services, buildings, communications; with grave social and economic problems (which only Fascism could see as hopes) arising in the new era since 1936, the Italian administration drew to its final phase of defeat and supersession.

## XII

### BRITISH OCCUPATION

#### 1. *The Keren Campaign*

THE first phase of the European war in Eritrea was one of rumour and speculation, of increased movement to and from Rome; of military regrouping and recruitment of Eritreans, formation of new head-quarters, rivalries for command; of re-joining reservists, but of 'exemptions' by thousands among the Italian able-bodied; of the massing of imports, filling of stores and arsenals, and preparation of air-raid shelters

The second phase followed the Italian declaration of war on 10 June 1940. It was marked by the loud blatancy of official propaganda, the enthusiasm of the few, the doubt and despondency of the many. Italian forces in all parts of their East African Empire were numerically formidable. They had some 300,000 men under arms, including an all-Italian division, many Blackshirt militia units, and a main body of locally raised regiments, among whom the Eritrean were by far the best. They had some 400 guns, 200 aircraft, medium and light tanks. Roughly a third of these forces, under the command of General Frusci, were in the northern zone which included Eritrea. This faced the Sudan.

British forces opposite to these, on the thousand-mile Sudan-Eritrea and Sudan-Ethiopia frontier and behind it, were three British battalions and some 5,000 Sudanis, lightly armed for police duties or colonial warfare, of the Sudan Defence Force.

It was inevitable that, for propaganda as well as military purposes, an Italian offensive should be launched at the Sudan. It was so launched early in July; its success, however, was moderate. Kassala, after a few hours of gallant opposition by the Sudan Defence Force, was occupied by a massive Italian force. This took no prisoners and no military booty. The Italian

commander, General Tessitore, proceeded elaborately to fortify the new possession.

With Kassala and Gallabat in their hands, powerful and reasonably mobile forces available, and the tempting prizes of Khartum, Atbara, and Port Sudan before them almost undefended, a full-scale invasion of the Sudan was indicated, and was in fact daily expected. That it was never initiated seems to be due to Italian nervousness of their ultimate petrol supplies, of the soundness of their vehicles and tyres, and perhaps of the loyalty or quality of some of their units; it was due also to complete misinformation about British strength, imparted by an elaborate system of misleading. Of this, and indeed of all the operations of war, Lieut.-Gen. W. Platt, in command of the Sudan, showed himself a master. There was no further advance. Italian outposts, instead, were worried by S.D.F. light forces, and the ponderous Kassala garrison of three brigades kept uneasy and unaggressive.

This period of midsummer 1940 represented, nevertheless, the height of Italian ascendancy. By September another phase of the campaign was beginning—a phase due to British decision to strengthen the east (as well as the north) African front, and to have done for ever with Italian East Africa. Reinforcements began to appear; the fifth Indian Division under Major-General Heath arrived, by land and sea, in the Sudan; three French units, a Cypriot transport corps, motor transport companies from South Africa, regrouped S.D.F. motor machine-gun companies, appeared and were allotted their parts, on the sector opposite Kassala or opposite Gallabat or prepared for mobile action anywhere. The Italian command sensed the altered balance, and brought down two more brigades of colonial troops and two more Blackshirt battalions to support those already in the area of Tessenei-Kassala. In Ethiopia the patriot bands and leaders stood in readiness to rise. Arms and instructions were sent in to them from Khartum. The emperor, supported by Colonel Sandford, Major Wingate, and a dozen other officers, awaited the moment to enter.

In November the first offensive contact with the Italian forces was established north of Kassala and at Gallabat. In January the 4th Indian Division, fresh from Cyrenaica under Major-General Beresford-Pierse, was placed under General Platt's command. It was accompanied by howitzers and by Infantry tanks. The first result of its appearance was a general withdrawal of Italian forces from the frontier: first, of their northern outposts to Keru and Wachai behind Sabderat, then of the main body from Kassala and Tessenei. The withdrawal was followed up and turned into a retreat by fast-moving formations of the 4th and 5th Divisions. These reoccupied Kassala, Sabderat, Tessenei, Aikota, while the rapid independent 'Gazelle force' under Colonel Messervy outflanked the enemy at Keru, followed him to Shaglat wells, and closely approached Agordat. The Agordat-Barentu road was cut, General Lorenzini threatened in the former and General Baccari cut off at the latter town. General Platt moved up for a full-scale attack on Agordat. It was occupied after a brilliantly successful action (against, as usual, enormously superior forces) on 1 February. Barentu fell on the day following. Its garrison was in part captured, in part escaped with the loss of all its vehicles by the track to Arresa. British political officers assumed the administration of western Eritrea.

All Eritrea west of Keren was thus cleared of Italian forces in a few days, with heavy captures of men and materials. The process was accompanied by demoralization and loss of confidence in the Italian army. This was increased by news of the simultaneous débâcle in Cyrenaica and proved by increasing desertion among native troops, which British field propaganda stimulated.

The next and final stand was in the pass which cuts narrowly through wild and jagged hills to Keren. Italian forces, reinforced from Asmara and from Addis Abeba, were still formidable, their rear communications and supplies secure, the defensive position as near impregnability as nature could design it. A first dash by 'Gazelle force' at the new-made road-block,

west of the main position, failed to penetrate. An infantry attack on 4 February secured a lodgement, and held it; but no more. Two further attacks by formations of the 4th and 5th Divisions on 6 and 10 February did all that human gallantry could do; but the position could not be forced. Other means must be sought. There was a month's pause.

The 5th Division retired temporarily to Kassala for training in mountain warfare and to economize transport. A column of the 4th Division, with French units, worked down from Karora, to and through Kubkub and the Meshalit Pass, to threaten Keren from the north. The Italians meanwhile mustered their all in the Keren forts and outposts; but they could not stop the flow of native desertion, nor the cold apprehension spreading daily in the streets and cafés of Asmara. General Wavell from the north visited the British and Indian forces as the day chosen by their commander for his final attack drew closer.

It was launched on 15 March. A foothold was gained on the lower slope of Fort Dologorodoc. On 16 March the fort itself was taken, never to be lost. Gains were made on other mountain features, and mostly held. The skilful use of concentrated artillery made possible infantry attacks on otherwise untakable positions. Air bombing, which had been used most valuably throughout the campaign, further demoralized the defenders. General Lorenzini was killed, his men with mounting casualties approached their breaking-point. The last effort of the 9th and 10th Indian brigades was decisive. On 27 March General Platt's forces, themselves battered and exhausted, entered the plain of Keren. The town was occupied, the advance continued. Admirably commanded, Indian and British troops had shown an immense superiority in fighting quality over their enemy, and had accomplished a feat which all calculation must have declared impossible.

The last stand of the Italian forces, now resigned to defeat, was at Ad Teklesan, half-way from Keren to Asmara. It was easily broken. The defenders of Asmara sent out a white flag on 1 April, and the city was occupied. Personnel of the British

Military Administration, already prepared and operating, assumed the local government under general direction of the G O C.-in-C. The remnant of the Italian forces under General Frusci retired southward into Ethiopia. British prisoners emerged from the prison camp at Adi Ugri. The 4th Indian Division prepared to return to the Mediterranean theatre.

At Massawa gathered, under Admiral Bonnetti and General Tessitore, part of the Keren survivors with the local garrison of the port. The seven destroyers were sent to sea, never to reappear. The 5th Indian Division advanced down the road by Nefasit and Embatkalla, the 7th Indian Brigade and the Free French (who had descended on Keren from Karori) pressed into the Massawa defences from the north. Rome refused to allow the Admiral to surrender, but his token defence was scarcely serious. He and Tessitore and the whole garrison were captured. The merchant ships and dry docks had been scuttled.

## *2. British Military Administration*

The British forces, leaving units (mainly Indian and Sudanese) which became the standing garrison of the territory, passed into Ethiopia to end the campaign in the heart of the Tigris. The emperor, Haile Selassie, re-entered his capital in April 1941. The last Italian forces surrendered at Amba Alagi; the East African war was over.

The additions of territory made to Eritrea in 1936 were delivered back to the emperor, as having formed part of his dominions before the Italian invasion. The old colony resumed its boundaries. These contained, at the moment of British occupation, some three-quarters of a million Eritreans and 55,000 Italians.

The first act of the Military Administration was to proclaim the new authority, to call attention to the rules of war as these regarded the civil population, to invite obedience and promise tranquillity. The exchange-rate for Italian money against Egyptian was fixed, devaluing the lira to a halfpenny; offices were



opened in Asmara and at all Division and District head-quarters; a Custodian of Enemy Property assumed his duties.

To the installation of the new administration there was no shadow of resistance. All Fascist institutions were closed, papers removed, staffs interned. Italian troops—deserters and fugitives—were made prisoner. Possible disturbers of public order, known leaders of Fascism, the majority of the Carabinieri, and a proportion of the Europeans in the P.A.I. were removed; the press ceased publication.

With this clearing of the ground—essential to public and military security—the administration of the territory could proceed.

The nature and obligations of an occupation administration are prescribed by international law, whereby its freedom both of policy and of method is severely limited. The range of its legislation and of new taxation is restricted, the preservation of the *status quo* enjoined to the greatest extent consistent with military considerations. In this, and in two other ways, a military administration differs from that of a normal colony; the powers of the Administrator derive not from a Secretary of State, but from those inherent in the commander-in-chief as conqueror; and the superior personnel of the administration are themselves military officers, while much of the internal routine of supply and discipline conforms to or is integrally part of military procedure. The command of the local garrison in Eritrea belonged to a senior officer other than the Chief Administrator, purely military in function and charged with ultimate responsibility for the military security of the country.

Within these limitations, the policy and task of the Chief Administrator of Eritrea (known in his earlier months of office first as Deputy Chief Political Officer, then as Military Administrator) was to govern his territory in accordance with its existing (Italian) laws, and those of war; to enact, by proclamation, such others as might be required and justified; to show humanity and reason in his dealings with all classes and races; to make the minimum demands in men, money, and materials from the

higher command; and to use, for the immediate furtherance of the war effort of his own country, all the surplus resources of the territory in men and supplies. To accomplish these ends he had such staff of British officers and other ranks as he (or higher authority for him) could muster (a staff always minimal, improvised and largely untrained), and the surviving branches of the Italian administration.

The post of D.C.P.O., then of Military Administrator, was held by Brigadier B. Kennedy-Cooke (formerly governor of Kassala) for a year following the occupation of Asmara; that of Military Administrator, then Chief Administrator, by the present writer (who had administered Cyrenaica during the two brief occupations of 1941 and 1942, and served also in Somalia) from May 1942 until November 1944; and by Brigadier C. H. F. D'A. McCarthy from that date. These officers were supported by colleagues who showed, with the fewest exceptions, admirable energy and intelligence as well as integrity, and who enabled them to maintain an administration adequate to its functions and creditable to the country they represented.

The formula by which, initially, the administration was to operate was 'care and maintenance'. This was, however, interpreted with reasonable generosity both by administrators on the spot and by the War Office. In fact, the indirect needs of the war effort, as well as considerations of policy and common sense in the territory, led the administration to adopt standard and even to initiate reform and improvement—well above the theoretically possible minimum. This makes it the more creditable—and indeed surprising—that the final cost of the territory to the British Treasury was trifling; by the third year of the occupation Eritrea could show (purely military expenditure apart) a self-supporting administration. Financial control was close, efficient, and constructive. Egyptian currency gave place, after a few months, to East African.

An early care of the administration was the creation of a police force, to supersede (while in some part embodying) the Italian forces. This was on duty in all parts of the territory

within a few months, and providing all normal police services. Simultaneously—or rather, progressively as opportune times were agreed with the military authority—the railways and ropeway were taken over by the administration; power-houses and electric supplies; reservoirs and water-supply arrangements (which both at Asmara and Massawa were materially improved); roads, bridges, and all public works and buildings, except those in strictly military use; telephones and telegraphs. In the administration of these services full use was made of existing Italian offices, resources, and personnel. The same is true of the health and veterinary services, of which a close and constructive control was assured; of the Italian schools, purged only of Fascist teaching and school-books; of the departments of agriculture and forests, incorporating the Forest Militia and charged with the new duties for which the times called—increase of food-growing, better-organized destruction of locusts, milk-supply, pig-breeding; and of the customs and taxation departments. The important Tobacco Monopoly was operated by a British firm on behalf of the Chief Administrator. Creations of the administration itself were the Department of Labour and Public Assistance, and that of Trade and Supplies charged with the control of trade and industry and the feeding of the population. The government press was taken over, and a daily bilingual newspaper produced. A Department of Road Transport controlled all heavy traffic in the interests of economy. The head-quarters and secretariat of the administration were wholly non-Italian, and it was found desirable to remove the Italian *commissari* and *residenti* from all districts, save Asmara itself, where they worked (and worked loyally) under close supervision.

Six months after the occupation a start was made in the use of the territory, by American and British authorities, for important war projects. Asmara became a major repair-base for the British Overseas Airways Corporation, involving an important programme of construction and maintenance. This lasted from 1941 to early 1944. The United States army, using mainly

civilian contractors, reconstructed and equipped the Massawa naval base, contributed much to the commercial harbour there, and salvaged five of the smaller sunken steamships at Massawa; built a great rest-camp, and a naval ammunition depot, at Ghinda; amalgamated a dozen Italian workshops in Asmara to form a single arsenal; and enlarged, improved, and equipped Gura airport as a great American centre of aircraft maintenance. As the war receded to north-west Africa and then into Europe, these activities were concluded; Gura was dismantled, the arsenal handed to the British army, and Massawa base and Ghinda to the Royal Navy, for operation. By early 1941 American enterprise was confined to a powerful military wireless station. The Italian and Eritrean prophets, who had foretold an American government of Eritrea, were confounded.

A number of the British administrators had knowledge of African races, but none of Eritrea or its peoples; all was to be learnt. Yet, apart from the routine of government—the trying of native cases, encouragement of crops, settlement of disputes, hearing of complaints—it was possible, even within war-time limitations, to contribute something positive to native administration. Accessibility, courtesy, patience were shown as (in Eritreans' judgement) they had not been shown before. The colour-bar was modified, diminished. Schools were founded in many villages, with eager school committees of local notables. A flourishing and self-supporting English Institute catered culturally for Eritreans and Italians equally. Native Councils were formed at head-quarters of Divisions, periodically to meet, discuss, and advise. Native courts in some areas were given powers, previously exercised by the Residente, to try both criminal and civil cases. Agricultural shows, inspired by officers of the administration, were organized by all-Eritrean committees, and with great success. A weekly newspaper in Tigrinya was published by the active local office of the Ministry of Information, cinemas reserved to specialize for native taste. A successful society was formed by British charitable enterprise for the care of Eritrean children. Eritrean economics have, indeed, suffered

severely by an increase of population unaccompanied by an increase of cultivable land and emphasized by the return of thousands of disbanded landless soldiers; by cessation of the state employment which, generous in Italian times, a war-time administration cannot offer on the same scale; and by an alarming rise in the cost of living, without corresponding rises in pay or profits. Thus far, the Eritrean has fared ill under British occupation; but he has had sympathy and justice, and been treated as a man who may hope to rise. Towards the British, the Eritrean attitude has been, by great majority, as friendly as the exigencies of a military administration and an uncertain future could permit.

The same can fairly be said of the Italian community under British rule. Of the 55,000 Italians resident in the colony for whom the British became responsible, some 2,000 in all were interned and removed, sooner or later, on security grounds. A further 1,000 of unessential or unemployable type were sent to suitable quarters in South Africa. Accommodation camps, in country districts of Eritrea, were constructed for a thousand more. Some 12,000, mainly women and children, were in 1942 and 1943 repatriated to Italy in ships sent for the purpose by the Italian government. But the great majority of the community remained and remain. Representative of every class of Italian life, from highest to lowest, they have continued under the occupation to practise their various callings, to manufacture and to farm, to maintain all the public services, staff the government departments, act as doctors, priests, lawyers, clerks, teachers, as well as labourers, mechanics, shopmen. They have worked in thousands for the American and British war projects, supported (with rare exceptions) the administration, and lived under difficult conditions with self-respect. Long expatriation and the bitterness of defeat kept Fascism alive among the lower elements during much of the occupation. It took, however, no active form and was always opposed by a group of verbally exuberant democratic parties which, with all their meetings and bickering newspapers and mutual rivalries, the administration

permitted or encouraged. Excellent co-operation was given by the Italian Red Cross, by the Church guided admirably by Bishop Marinoni, the missions and various charitable associations, and above all by the large body of Italian civil servants who have, with various degrees of energy and loyalty, served the occupation authority.

In the Italian community no feature of the times was more striking than the development of local industry during the years 1942-4. With the initiative and active help of the administration, a remarkable Industrial Exhibition was organized by an Italian committee in Asmara in 1943, and both marked the stage already reached in many infant industries—glass, pottery, boots, brewing, distilling, wine-making, woodwork, pig products, buttons, preserves and sweets, mineral waters, furs, matches, soap, and others—and sought the new interest of export markets. The diversion of effort and man-power from unemployment to an industrial field never permitted in Fascist times, was a feature of the administration's policy. This, and other aspects of Italian economics, will be again referred to on a later page.

### XIII

#### THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

##### 1. *The East and the North*

It will be valuable, before proceeding to summarize the economic and political position at which Eritrea stands to-day, to review, in such detail as may hope to be instructive yet not too wearisome, the peoples of the territory at the present time.

How far the coming and going of governments, the decrees and the laws, the roads and hospitals and policemen, have in fact affected the cultural or even the economic life of the common villager or tribesman, may well be argued; far less, it may be, than bureaucrats believe! But the general public's relation to the central administration, and inclusion under its hierarchy, gives at least an intelligible plan for their enumeration.

Within the Division of the eastern plain, with Massawa as its head-quarters, there are grouped, firstly, the Dahlak Islands. Of these, the inhabited islands include Dahlak itself (with a remarkable natural harbour, and the abortive oil-drilling which the British occupation interrupted), Nokra (seat of the Italian Residenza and ill-famed penal station), Nora, Dohol, Harat, Kubari, Daraka, Dinifarikh. The island population, supported by fishing and a few goats and camels, are of mixed Dankali, Somali, Arab, and Samhar blood, number some 3,000, and speak Tigré and some Dankali. Secondly, the Danakil, whose origins and present manner of life have been described on earlier pages. Some 20,000 live within Eritrea, an equal or greater number in Ethiopia and French Somaliland. They are grouped in the district of Massawa itself, including the Buri peninsula; in the district of Thio; and in that of Assab, where the bulk of its inhabitants and of Little Assab its suburb are themselves Danakil. The sultanate of Rahaita, beyond Assab on the French frontier, is Dankali, and the tiny fishing villages of Mersa Fatma, Thio, Edd, Beilul are of the same folk. They supply workers in the

salt-pans of Badoli, and work the potash (when it is worked) at Dallol in Ethiopia. (The depression of the salt plain, inland from here, boasts to be the hottest spot on the earth's surface.) For the rest, the Dankali are nomadic herdsmen, some owning cattle, others camels and goats. The tribes which can be distinguished among the Eritrean Danakil to-day are the Damohaita, some 4,000 strong; the Dahimela (all 'white-men', but independent); the Hadarim, who claim Hadhramaut origin, as the Bellasuwa and the Dunna claim Yemeni. Smaller tribes, including some predominantly Somali, are numerous—the Assabarka, Nassal, Afara, Ankala, Hawakil, Gadamto. There is no unity among them, and no outstanding leader.

The Massawa division includes, thirdly, the Samhar tribes, grouped directly under that head-quarters. They surround, as islands in a sea, the few permanent centres of population—the Massawa suburbs of Harkiko, Monkullo, Otumlo, Zaga, and the coastal villages of Mersa Kuba, Emberemi, Wakiro. They cultivate precarious crops during the winter, crudely damming the mountain torrents which traverse their territory. In summer they seek the highland pastures with their herds. There is no caste system among these tribes, nor has any strong personality emerged. The tribes, among whom the Naibs of Harkiko still have influence, are petty and disunited. The chief are the Aflenda, some 2,500 strong in three sub-tribes; and the Meshalet of some 2,000, also subdivided. Elements of the Sahil tribes descend during the winter into Samhar pastures.

Fourthly, Massawa division contains, in its Ghinda district, a further group of half-sedentary tribesmen of mixed origin. The district forms a narrow strip from north to south, but it includes both high and low altitudes. Fixed areas of it are visited annually by highland Tigrinya-speaking cultivators for their winter season. It contains also Muslim Tigré-speaking sections, which move with their herds seasonally to the plains below or up to the Sahil or westward into the highlands. These are the Ad Aha (perhaps of Saho origin), Ad Shuma, Ad Askar, and Geden Sikta (drawn by origin from the Naib's soldiers and



irregulars), Nabara, Waria, Teroa Bait Mushé, Iddifer. The two last mentioned are bilingual in Tigré and Saho. The district contains the permanent villages of Ailet, with mineral springs; Gumbod, Asus, and Damas, and the administrative centre, Ghinda, in a pleasant plain; and in general it links the Samhar with the highlands, combining the races and economies of both.

North of the Samhar and of the Hamasien division lies the Keren Division, with its two districts of Keren and of Nagfa and its great area of broken mountains, barren hills, and coastal wilderness. Of its peoples much has been said on previous pages. The Nagfa district, poor and grainless except in rare plots, contains the great tribe of the Habab, largest of the Bait Asghedé and 25,000 strong, under its aged Cantibai 'Uthman bin Hidad who has held the post against all rivals for nearly fifty years; the Ad Temariam, 7,000 strong, also Bait Asghedé; the Ad Shaikh, of some 9,000 souls, grouped round the descendants of their holy founder; the Ad Tsaura, 2,000 strong and lacking the serf system usual among its neighbours; the Ad Mu'allim, 1,000 strong, with the same peculiarity and claiming (as usual) Arab origins. The Bait Mala in the far north is a Beja tribe of some 3,000 souls, once subject to the Banī Amir, now independent. It is bilingual in Beja and Tigré. The others mentioned speak Tigré only. The Rashaïda, newly settled Yemenis along the coast, have been described elsewhere. Except for them, all the Nagfa tribes migrate annually to the coastal lowlands. The Habab not infrequently move, in search of grazing, to the Tokar district of the Sudan.

In Keren District better rainfall produces an agricultural life and static 'tribes'. These comprise the two groups of the Bilein—Bait Taukwé and Bait Tarké, each 10,000 strong, with a smaller third, the Jangeren of 1,000 souls—both now subdivided into sections; the Marea, Red and Black, together some 25,000 in number, and each in turn subdivided into lesser groups; the Mensa, with 5,000 members between Bait Abrehé and the Bait Shaken; the Beijuk of 4,000 souls; and the Ad Takles, 10,000 strong, who are of the Bait Asghedé. Mention has been made

before of the probable origins and the strange serf-and-master social system of these peoples. The latter, interesting to the sociologist, presents problems to the administrator; indeed, a difficulty—ancient and accepted usage versus modern tendency, privilege versus freedom—not yet resolved. The British administration has refused to enforce the full claims of the masters (which include customary gifts as well as crop shares) but must leave final settlement to a less temporary successor.

Breaking the symmetry of Divisional and racial boundaries are, close to the Hamasien border of Keren division, four small districts of Tigrinya-speaking Copts with enda and village organization strictly on Hamasien lines. The four, each deriving its name from its largest village, were united by the Italian administration into a single district under a Meslenie.

There is throughout the Keren Division no town save Keren itself. Nagfa District depends entirely on import for its grain, which it obtains, in exchange for cattle, from Agordat and Masawa; Keren is self-supporting in a favourable year.

## 2. *The West*

We pass to the Division of the western plains, with its headquarters at Agordat. The only towns of the Division are the three administrative centres of Tessenei, Barentu, and Agordat itself. There is village life in the Kunama-Baria country and in the few settlements of Sabderat, Aikota, Gullui, Umm Hajar.

The Districts of Agordat and Tessenei contain the Bani Amir tribes, that of Barentu the Baria and Kunama. The latter tribe overflows into the Umm Hajar sub-area of Tessenei.

The Bani Amir, so often mentioned, are the greatest tribe group of Eritrea and, with vicissitudes of fortune, can show a long continuity of rule and organization. Some 60,000 of the confederacy are in Eritrea, half that number more in the Sudan. They are, by majority, pastoral nomads and camel-breeders, well armed, given to banditry, and ancient enemies and mutual raiders with the Hadendowa, the neighbouring Beja group in

the Sudan. The caste system of Nabtab and serf class still persists. All alike are Muslim, all revere the Mirghani family, whose chief (but weak-minded) Eritrean representative died in 1943 at Agordat. All conform to the loose system of separate tribes united only by their common way of life, religion, ruling aristocracy, and hereditary prince, the Diglal. The present holder of this post, Gailani Husain, was removed to Khartum at the time of the British occupation but restored with good results to his government in 1943. His traditional second-in-command, the Shaikh ul Mushayikh of the confederacy (always from a separate branch of the reigning family), is now supported by two equal colleagues, each with authority over a third of the whole. The constituent tribes show their diverse origins in that some speak only Tigré, some only To Bedawi (Beja), some both Arabic is understood by a few headmen. The tribes vary greatly in size and strength. Those recognized to-day as separate units responsible to their Shaikh ul Mushayikh and the Diglal are tabulated in Appendix B.

Three petty communities are found, surrounded by Bani Amir but distinct from them, in the District of Tessenei. They are the Sabderat, living in the village of that name, settled folk speaking Tigré and Arabic; the Ilit, around Aikota on the main Barentu-Tessenei road, with a language entirely their own; and the Bitama, east of Sabderat. These groups number about 3,000, 600, and 150 respectively. The latter two are of negroid type, all are Muslim. The Shukriya, Arabs of the Sudan, live inside Eritrea on the frontier.

Filling the District of Barentu are the two negroid peoples of the Baria to the north, and the Kunama to the south. Reference to these and their way of life—their clans and dialects, their matriarchy and magic—was made when they first appeared in Eritrean history; and, except for their frequent sufferings at the hands of all their neighbours, they have to-day changed but little. They have, since the Italian occupation, themselves offended often against authority, and in turn been raided by Bani Amir groups or parties from Shiré over the Setit; but never on the

former scale. There are to-day perhaps 15,000 Baria, 10,000 Kunama. They live in distinct groups, each containing settled and permanent villages from which they practise agriculture. The Kunama sub-tribes are named from the rivers or tracts of country which they inhabit: the Marda, Barka (that is, Gash), Mogreb, Tika, Sogodas, Lakatakura. All these belong to Barentu, except the last two which fall within Umm Hajar district. There is no paramount head of the Kunama. They are still pagan, with a few hundred Catholic converts. The Baria fall in but two main groups, the Mogreb and the Hijjar, and a single Nazir of the Baria has authority above both of these, which are, in turn, subdivided into village areas. The Baria are Muslim, with a pagan residue. Both the Swedish and Catholic missions have long worked amongst them and the Kunama.

At the villages of Dukumbia and Woggero in Kunama country are found a group of Tigrinya-speaking Copts, collected from Shire and from the highlands of Eritrea. Along the Sudan frontier of Tessenei and Umm Hajar are half-settled groups of Sudanis and West Africans.

Since the British occupation a spur of the Sudan railways, from Malawiya south-west of Kassala, runs through Eritrea to Tessenei. A gap from there to Agordat is thus left in rail communication between Massawa and Khartum.

If the abiding administrative problem of Keren is that of serf and master, the problem of the western plain is that of security. The Kunama country is close and difficult, its boundary with wild ungoverned Ethiopia is open; the Bani Amir country includes 10,000 square miles or more of open steppe and ravine-cleft hills. The peoples are primitive and predatory. They are stirred by feuds and hunger, and can hope for impunity. Even in Italian times, with hundreds or thousands of regular and irregular native troops stationed in the area, security here was imperfect; the British administration, with a tithe of these resources, has so far failed satisfactorily to achieve it.

### 3. *The Highlands*

The three Divisions of the Eritrean highlands follow closely the boundaries of the three traditional regions (Hamasiën, Akkele Guzai, Sarai) from which they are named.

Of the differences between them in social organization, clear as this was at the time of the Italian occupation, there is now little trace. Society is uniform in them all, though in some measure their original loyalties are still felt. There are minor differences of vocabulary in their Tigrinya, but those of usage, according to the different systems of customary law, are not so much between Divisions as between groups of villages within them.

The plateau Districts recognized to-day as the units of administration within the Residenza, and each under a salaried Meslenie, are the creation of the Italians. They represent a formalization of the territorial units within which, in former days, kinship (real or traditional) was the bond; and no other or better unit could have been adopted. In the process of formalization, however, departures have been made which are the weakness of the system. Firstly, many present districts are artificial; they represent, that is, no natural group. Secondly, the chiefs are often unsuitable and were installed for reasons which ignored the needs of the position. Many, even of those traditionally entitled to the chief's authority, are now town-dwellers and losing touch or sympathy with their own people. A sounder organization for the future, perhaps, would refashion the districts so as to correspond better with areas of a natural unity; and would introduce, cautiously at first, the element of election into the choice of chiefs. This would in principle be no novelty to the Eritrean villager, whose own institutions, within his village, have always been freely democratic.

No merely administrative improvement, however, would solve the most pressing and truly serious of highland problems: the land shortage. Something clearly could be done by more intensive cultivation—manuring, terracing, clearing; but this would

not suffice. The present evils are three. There is, firstly, the actual shortage of food produce, involving import from the Tigrai and too frequent malnutrition. There is, next, the endless village and enda litigation over land, due to its value. And there is finally the social evil of the inferior 'landless stranger' class in the villages. All could be cured by the provision of more land, and this must come from areas where it can best (though in small extent) be found, the eastern edge and slopes of the plateau. Existing land must be cultivated upon a less rigid system than the present exclusive freehold of the enda; that is, upon one of collective village tenure. And more land—though still not much—can be made available if Italian-held concessions are gradually abandoned, and grazing-lands and hay-growing meadow-lands come under the plough.

But the rural economics of the highlands are no easy question. They lie behind any and all administration of these villagers; and they will not improve when, with probable lessening of European enterprise and employment, much of the urban proletariat of Asmara (whose own livelihood to-day is scarcely less a problem) must return to the land or starve.

The districts of the Asmara Residenza of Hamasien Division number seventeen. That of Decamere contains only one. In Akkele Guzai, the Residenza of Saganeiti has ten, that of Adi Caieh nine, that of Senafé sixteen. In the Division of Sarae, the Residenza of Adı Ugri contains twenty-five districts, that of Adı Quala seven. In size, population, and importance they vary enormously. The chiefs vary no less in age and standing, in efficiency, and in the principles upon which they were selected. They contain outstanding personalities—eighty-year-old Ras Kidanemariam of Arresa in Sarae, the Baraki family of Hamasien (sons of the Ras who greeted the Italians in 1885), Ras Tesemma and his son Dejjach Abraha in Akkele Guzai, and many more—and a wealth of folk-lore, tradition, and scenic beauty. Missionary enterprise, Catholic and Swedish, has long been active, and both can claim communities of converts. The Ethiopian Catholics number perhaps 10,000 on the whole plateau

(as against 240,000 Copts), the Presbyterians about half that number.

East of the main north-south road through Akkele Guzai, and down the eastern escarpment, are the Saho. From bold robbers they have turned, in half a century, into peaceful nomads who vary their pastures with the season, and keep the peace with their Christian hosts and neighbours. Their migrations take them far to the west across Akkele Guzai and across the Mareb in the Hazamo plain to the Sarac; and, surprisingly, little friction with the Christian cultivators is caused. They touch the sea-coast only in the Arafali Corridor, and supply Zula with the majority of its inhabitants. They no longer spread into the Samhar, though the Teroa there speak Saho; nor do they now (as in Napier's time) predominate in Senafé. Their chief spokesman, the aged Nasir Pasha, is a leading figure in tribal Eritrea. His tribe, the Assaorta, are some 17,000 strong and include six pure and five added or affiliated sub-tribes. The Miniferi number 10,000, and divide into four sub-sections, which acknowledge a single head for the whole. Both Assaorta and Miniferi are taking gradually to agriculture. The same is true of the smaller Saho tribe of Debrimela, in two branches; but untrue of the Hazu, 4,000 strong. These never cultivate, but live at feud with the Danakil and with their neighbours in Irob.

Before turning finally from the society of the highlands, we should mention certain Muslim elements (besides the Saho) found widely among the Copts. There are in Asmara city large numbers of Sudanis, mostly Anglo-Egyptian subjects but a few French. A few more live in the port areas of Massawa and Assab. All are simple labourers; their total number in Eritrea may be 8,000. With them, but far above them in society, are the smaller communities of Yemen and Hadhramaut (and rarely of Hijaz) origin, who provide the specialized stevedore labour at Massawa docks, and to whom belong some of the most considerable Asmara and Massawa merchants. Feeling is chronically hostile between the Yemen community in Asmara and the Coptic majority, and has led to violent clashes. A small Indian (Muslim

and Hindu) community of shopmen and traders deserves mention; they share the piece-goods trade with the few houses of Aden Jews settled in Asmara, and with the Greeks. The latter themselves are a compact self-respecting colony some 300 strong with their Church, school, and patriotic tradition. But a more important Eritrean element than any of these are the Jiberti, Eritrean Muslims whose suggested origins were mentioned on an earlier page. Their numbers were no doubt increased by the wars of Ahmad the Left-Handed, and by the same steady Islamic pressure which has converted the Marea and the Bilein. They may now number some 30,000, divided between the Maliki, Hanafi, and Shafa'i rites of the Sunna. All speak Tigrinya, some also Arabic. They live peacefully with their neighbours in the capital and the smaller highland towns, yet adhere strongly—even provocatively—to their faith. They are in general richer, more progressive and more public-spirited than their Christian fellow citizens.

Tables of population, religions, and languages for the whole native population are given in Appendix C.

#### 4. *Economic Survey*

This rapid survey of the Eritrean peoples at the present day, sufficient for the general onlooker though not for the administrator, may furnish, additionally to the outline already given of Eritrea's past fortunes, material for generalization and for prophecy.

The country consists, as has been seen, of a small highland fragment of northern Ethiopia surrounded by greater areas clearly distinct therefrom and from each other. It is orientated equally towards the south, towards the sea, and towards the west. It combines elements of the oldest Africa with others of modern Europe. Essentially diverse within itself, the territory has by fortune become a detached political unit, whose future must shortly be decided.

To what, economically, does the territory amount, or can it be made to amount?



That any European community which remains in Eritrea must depend on import for most of its requirements is obvious; equally, that it must pay for these by some form of effort. The wealth of the Eritrean population, and its hope of self-sufficiency, can lie only in its agriculture, its herds, and its minerals.

The agricultural possibilities of the country, as previous pages have suggested, are limited. They are, and will always be, diminished by two general dangers: failure of rainfall, which is not uncommon throughout the territory and almost annual in one area or another; and visitations of locusts which, if by great efforts all home-hatched swarms are destroyed, can arrive already adult, and with disastrous consequences, from the uncontrolled regions of Ethiopia or the Yemen. In spite of these major risks, agriculture is in fact practised in all parts of the territory except the sea-coast, the north, and the north-west. It is practised in primitive form, of which conservatism and poverty and jealous land claims will long obstruct the improvement; and largely in broken or mountainous country where cultivable patches are small, and controlled irrigation (even were stored water available) impossible. Only in the broad stretches of the central and southern Bassopiano Occidentale can large estates and modern methods be imagined, and there in fact one modern-type estate exists; but the rain is precarious, and further irrigation must be competitive with the needs of the Gash delta in the Sudan. The climate must always preclude the use of European labour in the lowlands.

In general, then, no major land development is probable, nor could it easily attract the capital required for it. Proposals sometimes advanced for Jewish or for Assyrian settlement in Eritrea are fantastic, unless the present population is first to be removed, and the lowest standard of life anticipated. Eritrea will no doubt continue to import the grain surplus of the Tigray to make good its own normal deficiency, to feed therefrom the grainless Danakil, Bani Amir, and Habab nomads. Local surpluses—in Sarae, or around Agordat—are, if they occur, immediately absorbed by

needy areas adjacent. Import from the Yemen is common, by dhow to Massawa, but is small and variable

Of the produce of the soil only the dum-nut is a major exportable asset of Eritrea; it gives the hard 'vegetable ivory' used for buttons. This is exported in natural or manufactured form; and with it small quantities of sisal, of which, however, there is but one estate. The crops grown for local use are dhurra (sorghum), maize, millet, a little barley and wheat, dagussá (*eleusine coracana*) for local beer-making, taff (*erogrotis abyssinica*), the most favoured of local highland grains, various peas and beans, oil seeds on a small scale, flax and sisal, onions and pimento. The culture of tea and the olive has been tried in vain; coffee grows well on the eastern slopes, but on a negligible scale. Tobacco grows well and could, with improved treatment, be made to supply local native needs.

The forest belts of the territory, which the last century has seen gravely diminished, are now small and remote from main centres. They can take no major place in its economy, unless after some exceptional and costly effort of replanting, against native apathy and goats' destruction. At least forty types of trees are found. They include six varieties of acacia, the beobab, the juniper (but no other conifer), the euphorbia (candelabra tree), eucalyptus (imported), false ebony, balonites, tamarind, casuarina, sycamore, wild olive, and a large number of deciduous trees useful for house construction or furniture, and in some cases yielding gum and inferior tanning bark. These resources meet local needs, have assisted war-time industry, and have even permitted some abnormal export; but they can never be an outstanding asset.

The pastoral life of half the population suffices to keep them at a level of bare subsistence, with cattle as their unit of wealth as well as provider of livelihood. The pastures of the territory—upon which agriculture, through increasing population, has made some inroads in the highlands during the last fifty years—are, thanks to scanty rainfall, poor to the point of absurdity by European standards; and they have produced a type of cattle

inferior in nearly all respects. Herds could be increased, but the exportable surplus of meat and hides, which would then be considerable, would still be of low value. Milk yields are notably low and milk collection, to-day government-organized, is made especially difficult by the remoteness of grazing grounds. Hides are of indifferent quality; high-grade tanning materials are not found locally. It would not be difficult to produce improved milking herds by developing the best local strains (the Barka cattle) or by importing others from the Yemen; but this at best could visualize no more than the needs of a local European community, at present barely supplied. Locally tanned leather is used to-day by a modern Asmara shoe factory, but this itself could scarcely survive open world competition.

Pig breeding and the preparation of products therefrom have made great advances since the British occupation, and find (but perhaps only in war conditions) a ready market. The produce is of excellent quality.

Red Sea fish are plentiful, and the ports of Massawa and Assab could be equipped much better than they are to exploit this industry. The inland market will always be limited, but export of salted or (with greater promise) dehydrated fish can be imagined; salt is plentiful and ice available at a price. Such enterprise, on the other hand, would need costly initial equipment in boats and storage, and the Eritrean ports are too far from main markets—where they would compete with fisheries nearer at hand and at least equally favoured—to inspire much confidence in this industry. The same is true of Red Sea sponges, of medium to poor quality; and Red Sea pearls, not of the best. Mother-of-pearl is exported to America. Fish products—shark-oil, fish-meal—are at an early stage of development and have a limited promise. Certain of the Red Sea islands have guano deposits of some value.

Mineral possibilities of the territory were very thoroughly investigated under the Italian administration. Traces of low grade or inaccessible deposits of iron, lead, manganese, and copper have been examined; none of these are workable. The lignite

of Adi Ugri could not, even in war time, be exploited with economic soundness. First prospecting and then test drilling for mineral oil was carried out prior to 1941 on the Dahlak Islands, but no oil was revealed, and little promise. Mica of low quality was exported to Italy. Sulphur exists abundantly on the northern edge of the Dankali desert, but offers every transport difficulty; it has, at times, been exploited for export. The potash of Dallol, worked for a time before the war by an Italian company, belongs in fact to Ethiopia. Gold from quartz has been mined on an ambitious scale at two mines in the Kunama country—Ugaro and Susena—at Shumagalle near Asmara, and at many small outcrops; but the conditions and yield are nowhere favourable, and it seems that only the most economical working and an exceptional market could justify the industry. The Italian parastatal mining organization was ponderous and costly.

In general, then, the mineral wealth of Eritrea, while not quite negligible, has offered but a small contribution to its economics, and is unlikely to offer more.

#### *5. Future of the European Community*

The economics of the territory, thus far reviewed, are seen to be modest and little promising. They could be otherwise, in the field of agriculture, fisheries, forests, and minerals, only by the infusion—unlikely enough, and socially of doubtful consequences—of foreign capital and effort on an important scale. Such effort could valuably and harmlessly be directed to developing the country (and especially Keren and Asmara) as a tourist centre for which indeed its climate, interest, and modern amenities well qualify it. It could continue, also, the development of such industries as, already well established under war-time stimulus, can hope for a permanent place in East African economics; brewing and distilling, preparation of hides, glass-work, bacon, and matches may be among them. And Europeans can (indeed, must) continue to staff the public services, and many or most of the tasks of government.

All these functions are performed at present by the Italian

community of Eritrea, numbering, early in 1945, some 40,000. The future of the community depends upon political, administrative, and economic factors. Politically, few Italians would choose (or perhaps would be permitted) to remain under African rule, should the future of the territory involve this; more, but not most, under that of non-Italian Europeans; more still, and possibly a majority, under a restored Italian régime. Administratively, the presence of Europeans—that is, Italians—to staff the water and electricity installations, maintain roads and telegraphs (and railway, if it survives), and much else besides in the operations of central and local government, must be of great advantage—indeed almost indispensable, unless such services are to be abandoned altogether. Other Europeans would perform such functions no better, and more expensively; Indians would create one problem more; local Africans are at present quite unqualified. These services could employ perhaps from 1,000 to 2,500 Europeans. And (to pass from the administrative to the economic field) to these must be added all those concerned with surviving local industry, if this is to be allowed full and fair opportunities, with the hotel and tourist industry, and the banks, travel agencies, restaurants, shops, amusements connected with it; and with transport.

It is clear that there can be no question of Eritrea supporting a European population upon its present scale; nothing in the soil or resources or possibilities of the territory permits it; and the longer it remains, the more will it become an administrative and political as well as an economic embarrassment. It is a painfully lingering by-product of the Ethiopian war, and must in great majority be removed. That, however, there is and will be place for a number of Italians somewhere intermediate between 3,000 and 6,000 is no less clear, provided always that the territory is left under a régime rendering their presence possible and desirable.

#### 6. *The Future of Eritrea*

The disposal of the Italian community of Eritrea depends, as the lesser upon the greater, upon that of the territory as a whole.

This main issue may now be considered in the light of its history, its races, its economics

Historically, it has been seen that a small part of Eritrea—but the most populous and homogeneous part—was for many centuries an integral part of the Ethiopian State, or, for a century, of the effectively independent kingdom of the Tigrāi. Of the rest of Eritrea, part was normally claimed and taxed by the Ethiopian representative on the plateau: that is, the Keren tribes (the old Bogos area and its near neighbours) and the Samhar. Part was the subject of a general and intermittent claim to sovereignty, and of occasional raids for cattle and slaves in token thereof: that is, the nomadic tribes of northern and western Eritrea, the Kunama-Baria quadrilateral, and the Danakil. Effective control (by the standards of an Ethiopian government) was thus maintained, it may be said, in the highlands, some measure of authority admitted in the mountain and lowland areas nearest thereto; and no control beyond that. Turkish and later Egyptian government of Massawa continued, and was not seriously questioned, from the sixteenth century until the Italian occupation. Egyptian control of the Banī Amir (in succession to that of the Fung empire) lasted for half a century, and was followed by Italian. The Egyptian occupation of the Keren area, however, was never acquiesced in by the Negus, and no historical claim can properly be based upon it; no area, on the other hand, was more brutally misgoverned or non-governed by the Ethiopian power.

Still on the historical issue, it is sometimes forgotten that if the present Ethiopian empire claims—as of course it does—complete continuity with that of Menelik II, it cannot well ignore the latter's treaties and frontier demarcations. The cession to Italy of territory north of the Mareb, and subsequent delimitation of this in detail, were not the work of hasty or dictated treaties; they were free and formal acts of the Ethiopian State, after its victory at Adua. This aspect, however, should not be given more importance than it deserves.

Racially and culturally, the Eritrean highlanders are Ethio-

pian; the Keren tribes have some Ethiopian blood as well as a Ge'ez-derived language, but they are Mushm. The same is true of the Samhar and Sahil; in these, however, racial traces of Ethiopia are less, and of the Beja more. The Bani Amir contain faint Ethiopian traces only in certain sub-tribes, and are generally non-Ethiopian in blood as well as civilization. The Kunama and Baria have, of course, no cultural or racial element of Ethiopia at all.

Economically, Massawa and the Samhar are indissoluble from the highlands, as are the highlands from the Tigrāi. Neither the Kunama nor the Bani Amir, on the other hand, nor the Sahil, nor the Keren tribes, have any necessary economic connexion with the highlands. The old pre-Italian east-west line of traffic across Eritrea passed from Massawa to Keren and eastward without touching the Asmara plateau.

As regards political sentiment, where their own future and that of Eritrea or its component parts are discussed, the different communities (or rather, the few spokesmen capable of conceiving or formulating political opinions) hold, as might be expected, widely varying views. Those of the Coptic highlanders are deeply divided. The elements among them who favour some sort of union of all or part of Eritrea with Ethiopia are the young race-conscious and usually Mission-educated intelligentsia of Asmara, the Coptic priesthood, who favour the emperor in the hope that he will favour them; a small proportion of the chiefs and village heads, and a very few of the merchant class. The idea of such union is opposed by most merchants who value principally security; by a majority of the chiefs; by all who value the progress made in Eritrea in the last half-century and contrast its present condition with that of northern Ethiopia; and by all ranks of the Muslims. It is untrue that the highlands, with a single voice or even with a clear majority, either demand or reject Ethiopian union. They are divided, inarticulate, unable justly to appreciate the issues concerned and the effects of either or any policy, and desirous principally of their own immediate advantage. 'Demonstrations' in support of or opposition to any-

thing at any time can, of course, be arranged with ease by anyone willing to pay for them.

Once off the Coptic highlands, it is certain that no considerable element whatsoever of the population desires a close connexion with the Ethiopian empire. It is not less certain that Ethiopian spokesmen claim and will claim all Eritrea as their 'right'.

Certain assumptions must here be made. The first is that the interest of the inhabitants of the territory is the first consideration, far more than that either of colonizers or of monarchs; the second, that such interest is above all in security, tranquillity, and the possibility of progress; the third, that there is no *a priori* reason why the present artificial unit of Eritrea should, after a mere half-century of existence, be perpetuated if it can be shown that the resolution of the territory into its racial and geographic elements can provide a sounder solution.

There is indeed nothing impossible in the retention of the old colony under a single European or African rule; but a solution on such lines is unlikely to find favour. Against a mere reassignment to Italy is the majority (though not quite the unanimous) feeling of the inhabitants, and the fear that at some future date the territory might again be misused as a base for aggression. Against assignment to another European power is the probable unwillingness of any to accept it; the charge would be unrewarded, probably, by either wealth or gratitude. Against the sometimes advocated assignment of the whole to Ethiopia (which would accept and indeed actively claims it) is the certainty that much of Eritrea was never Ethiopian; that such parts could not now be suitably or acceptably ruled by that government; and that no part has been politically Ethiopian since the deliberate cession of Beyond-the-Mareb by Menelik. For the formation of an all-native Eritrean State or Republic—a proposal not quite unknown to the intelligentsia of Asmara—there are no materials, because there exists no imaginable governing or administrative class; it could not but end in anarchy, or in renewed European control.



It seems, then, that the single Eritrea of to-day is doomed.

Dismemberment, in some form and to some extent, must be the alternative. If this is so—and the evident racial and cultural and historical diversities suggest it—it must be in favour of the two greater neighbours of the territory, the Sudan and Ethiopia.

In view of their position astride the present frontier, their kinship with the rest of the Beja group, their history of allegiance to a Nile-valley power (but never to an Ethiopian), their Islamic faith, it is difficult to resist the suggestion to attach the Bani Amir tribe-group to the Sudan, where it would without effort find a congenial place. The case for transference of the tribes of the northern hills and the Sahil is almost as strong. Their present frontier is as artificial and as frequently ignored by their own migrations; nor have they, at least for centuries, supported the pretence of Ethiopian rule. The Nilotic tribes of the Kunama and Baria should accompany the Bani Amir.

The assignment to the Sudan of these three groups is consonant with all our basic assumptions and reduces the remaining Eritrea to small proportions. It leaves, however, other problems for solution. They are those of, firstly, the Coptic highland itself—Hamasien, Sarae, and Akkele Guzai; secondly, Keren and its settled Muslim tribes (the Marea, Mensa, Bilein, Ad Tekles, Bejjuk); thirdly, the Saho tribes; fourthly, Massawa and the Samhar; fifthly, the Danakil.

This list can at once be simplified. The Danakil with their long frontier with Ethiopia and their stretch of sea-coast (including Assab, useless to Eritrea, invaluable to Ethiopia) could conveniently join the rest of their race in the Ethiopian empire, where their suzerain the Sultan of Aussa already lives. A northern boundary for this people in the near neighbourhood of Arafali could easily be fixed in detail. The Saho tribes must necessarily be one with the rest of the Akkele Guzai, despite their difference in habit and religion; their geographical overlap and their economics of grazing and marketing preclude the possibility of separation. More important, Massawa and its coastal hinterland to the foothills of the Ghinda district cannot reasonably be

assigned to any power but that which controls the Asmara plateau. The difference in language and religion, and the long political separation, must be granted; but, apart from considerations of seasonal grazing as between the higher and lower level, the need for the traffic and commerce of the highlands to have its own outlet, the need of the port to its own healthier hinterland, the need to preserve under a single authority the modern communications running inland to the plateau, can be met only by refusing to separate the highlands from Massawa and the Samhar.

The outstanding problems, therefore, are now two: that of Asmara-Massawa and the highlands, and that of Keren and its tribes.

It cannot be justifiable to continue, if it can at all be avoided, the cleavage enforced by the present Eritrean southern boundary between the Ethiopian Tigray and its northern part which is the Eritrean plateau. Every consideration of history and of race, language, culture, and economics urges the effective uniting of these two areas. The result would be a notably homogeneous and compact unit of population, from which both parts would benefit and to which both have their own contributions to make—the northern area, its port and communications; the southern, its cornfields and its man-power. The whole unit would have natural and already acknowledged frontiers.

Its political disposal need be no insoluble problem.

Firstly, it could be assigned without stipulation to the Emperor, at the risk (if present conditions in the Tigray are any guide) of allowing a general reversion to Ethiopian standards of administration, and the decay or destruction of fifty years of outstanding material progress in the northern part of the territory, Eritrea. Our first assumption—the paramount importance of the well-being of the population—seems to be unsuited by this solution.

Secondly, the territory could be so assigned with the proviso or safeguard of the employment by the Emperor of European advisers or inspectors. There can be no confidence, however, that the presence of these would suffice to maintain

administration at a satisfactory level. There is, indeed, enough evidence to suggest every probability of the contrary. Nor would any régime of excluded or privileged areas, or local safeguards, produce anything but friction and trouble.

Thirdly, the united Tigrāi unit or State could be placed under the sovereignty of the Emperor and be administered, in his name and on his behalf, by a European power, if such be found willing to assume the task and to face the certain (but not serious) financial loss from the administration of Ethiopia, increased by new homogeneous territory (including an admirable port) would benefit by an enlightened administration both of this and of the now disaffected and almost ungoverned Tigrāi. This solution would be generally (but not unanimously) welcome in the Eritrean highlands, and almost certainly in the Tigrāi also—where direct 'rule' by the Shoan dynasty has hitherto been a record of ceaseless rebellion and discontent. It would be viewed critically by the Ethiopian government; but this should not, perhaps, outweigh the certain advantage of the population at large.

In the case of Keren and its tribes the decision to be made is as between adhesion to the Sudan or to the Eritrean plateau, whatever be the fate of the latter. The argument from sovereignty over this area in past centuries would rather favour the Ethiopian claim, and the peoples' strain of Ethiopian blood runs counter to their present Islamic culture. In sentiment they are strongly anti-Ethiopian. The balance of advantage to the tribesmen and townsmen of the area lies, it can scarcely be doubted, in inclusion in the Sudan, if this may be conceded to them. The one Hamasien-type Coptic district, on the Keren borders, elsewhere described, would pass to the highlands.

To summarize these suggestions, it appears to the present writer that a partition of the territory should be made. Muslim tribal areas adjoining the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan should be included in that country. The central Christian highlands of Eritrea, with the port of Massawa and the Samhar and the Saḥo tribes, should form part of a United Tigrāi state or province, which should be placed under the sovereignty of the Emperor

of Ethiopia but be administered, in his name, by a European power for either a stated or an unstated term of years. The Dankali country with Assab should be assigned unconditionally to the Emperor. Eritrea would cease to exist.

### *7 Conclusion*

The present account of Eritrea has been historical. It has been forced to omit many aspects of the territory which are full of human and picturesque interest, and for which the reader may well have looked; it is forced by the same considerations (with which, however, inclination is this time in accord) to cut short its disquisition on present and future politics. This formed no part of the author's historical task; it has been included, thus briefly, rather to illustrate the sort of use which ought to be made of historical conclusions in framing a policy than to frame it. It may well be, moreover, that decisions will have been made even before this book is published.

It has been admitted, in certain recommendations suggested, that the facts of political history (even if clearly established) are not the only factors to be considered. Present preferences of the populations concerned may well outweigh them, if such preferences can be well ascertained; economics may modify or even counter-balance them; culture, religion, race, all have their word to say.

In studying the claims of interested parties, or their champions, there is need for care. In so far as such claims rest on history, they can be controlled to the extent to which historical truth is discoverable. If they rest on other aspects of the territory concerned—topography or economics—they must be considered by those best instructed in these aspects; and these may well be persons familiar with the territory at first hand. In so far as such claims seek a political or dynastic advantage, the criterion whereby to judge them is, no doubt, the true welfare of the peoples themselves, rather than the gratification of any claimant.

# APPENDIX A

*Table of Italian (and later British) Administrative Divisions and Districts in Eritrea*

<i>Administrative Divisions (Commissariati)</i>	<i>Head-quarters</i>	<i>Administrative Districts (Residenze)</i>	<i>Head-quarters</i>
Hamasein	Asmara	Asmara	Asmara
Bassopiano Orientale	Massawa	Decameré*	Decameré
		Massawa	Massawa
		Dahlak Islands†	Nokra
		N Dankalia‡	Thio
		S Dankalia‡	Assab
		Ghinda§	Ghinda
Akkele Guzai	Adi Caieh	Adi Caieh	Adi Caieh
		Saganeiti§	Saganeiti
		Senafé§	Senafé
		Arafali‡§	Arafali
Sarac	Adi Ugri	Adi Ugri	Adi Ugri
		Adi Quala	Adi Quala
Keren	Keren	Keren	Keren
		Nagfa	Nagfa
Bassopiano Occidentale	Agordat	Agordat	Agordat
		Barentu	Barentu
		Tessenei	Tessenei
		Umm Hajar	Umm Hajar

## NOTES

- (1) \* Only from 1934, and initially under Akkele Guzai
- † Not maintained as a separate district by the British Administration
- ‡ Treated by the British as a separate division until 1944.
- § Vice Residenza.
- || Usually not so maintained
- (2) In the period 1936-41, the Greater Eritrea included the Tigrai Commissariati of
  - Tigrai Occidentale (H.Q., Adua), with 6 Residenze and 1 Vice-Residenza.
  - Adigrat, with 3 Residenze and 2 Vice-Residenza.
  - Macallé, with 3 Residenze and 4 Vice-Residenza.
  - Tembien, with 3 Residenze
  - Dankalia (H.Q., Assab), with 2 Residenze and 2 Vice-Residenza.
  - Faesi Galla (H.Q., Allomata), with 1 Residenza and 3 Vice-Residenze.

# APPENDIX B

*Table of Banu Amir Constituent Tribes*

<i>Tribe</i>	<i>Popula- tion</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>District</i>	
Daga	12,000	Beja, Tigré	Agordat	Nucleus was originally the entourage and camp-staff of the Diglal
Ad 'Umr				Five sub-tribes of Ad 'Umr, each now almost independent.
Ad Al Allam	2,000	Tigré	Agordat	
Al Hamid Awad	1,000	Tigré	Agordat	
Ad Humbirra	1,500	Tigré	Agordat	
Hassal	1,600	Beja	Tessenei	
Shanaiyab	1,500	Beja	Agordat	
Ad 'Uqud	10,000	Beja, Tigré	Agordat	
Ad Tuwas	1,700	Beja	Agordat	
Ad Al Bakhit	3,400	Tigré	Agordat	
Ad Taula	400	Beja	Agordat	
Sinkat Kainab	700	Beja	Agordat	
Ad Ibrahim	2,000	Beja, Tigré	Agordat and Tessenei	
Faidab	1,500	Beja	Agordat	
Ad Shaikh Garabat	1,200	Tigré	Agordat	} Tribe is in two distinct parts
Labat (1)	{ 2,500	Beja	Agordat	
Labat (2)		Beja	Tessenei	
Ad Sharaf	1,000	Beja, Tigré	Agordat	Negroid
Bait Awad	1,300	Tigré	Agordat	
Ad Ghadan	500	Tigré	Agordat	
Ad Gultana	4,000	Tigré	Agordat	
Ad Sala	500	Beja	Agordat	
Ad Nazi	300	Beja	Agordat	
Ad Hassali	200	Tigré	Agordat	
Ad 'Ali	300	Beja	Agordat	
Alman	300	Beja, Tigré	Agordat	
Hashish	100	Beja	Agordat	

## APPENDIX C

### *Table of Population, Language, and Religion Statistics (1943)*

All figures are approximate

	<i>Administrative Division</i>					
	<i>Asmara</i>	<i>Massawa</i>	<i>Adi Caieh</i>	<i>Adi Ugri</i>	<i>Keren</i>	<i>Agordat</i>
Sedentary people	200,000	15,000	85,000	121,000	70,000	44,000
Nomadic	9,000	30,000	29,000	2,000	60,000	62,000
	209,000	75,000	114,000	123,000	130,000	106,000
<i>Religions</i>						
Copts	172,000	2,000	72,000	107,000	14,000	4,000
Muslims	12,000	73,000	36,000	14,000	110,000	86,000
Catholics*	2,000		6,400	500	500	
Catholics†					5,000	750
Protestants	3,000			1,000	1,000	500
Pagan				500		15,000
<i>Language</i>						
Tigrinya	190,000	5,000	82,000	117,000	10,000	4,000
Tigre	6,000	32,000		2,000	92,000	43,000
Beja					1,000	25,000
Bilen	1,000				21,000	
Saho	1,000	6,000	31,000	3,000		
Afar (Dankali)		20,000	500			
Arabic	8,000	10,000	500	1,000	5,000	8,000
Nilotic and other	3,000	2,000			1,000	26,000

\* Ethiopian Rite.

† Mission

## APPENDIX D

### SOURCES

The sources from which the present account of Eritrea is derived are:

(a) For topography, natural conditions, present economics, communications and administration—the writer's own observations and records

(b) For the present races and tribes of the territory (and of adjacent countries), and considerations arising therefrom, the writer's own observations; studies made by officers of the British Military Administration of Eritrea since 1941, and those of recent Italian writers. Of the latter, particularly CAPOMAZZA, I., *La legge degli Atchemé Melga* (Macerata, 1912); id. *Genii Etnografici sulla popolazione dell' Acchele Guzai* (Napoli, 1909). Various papers by CONTI ROSSINI, C., LICATA, G. B., *Assab e i Danakil* (Milano, 1885), NESBITT, M., *La Dankalia esplorata* (Firenze, 1930); ODORIZZI DANTE, *Il Commissariato regionale di Massaua al 1 Gennaio 1910* (Asmara, 1911); id. *La Dankalia settentrionale* (Asmara, 1909); PERRINI RUFFILLO, *Di qua del Mareb* (Mareb Mellasc) (Firenze, 1905), id. *I Bari Amur* (Roma, 1895); POLLERA, A., *I Bari e i Cunama* (Roma, 1914); id. *Le Popolazioni indigene dell' Eritrea* (Bologna, 1935); RODEN, K. G., *Le tribù dei Mensa* (Italian tr. from Swedish, Stockholm, 1913), RAVA MASSIMO, *L'Eritrea* (Roma, 1927).

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(e) For the period 1885 to 1900: CRISPI, F., *La prima guerra d'Africa* (Milano, 1914); GAIHI, A., *Storia delle Colonie Italiane* (Torino, 1934); CAGNASSI, E., *I nostri errori tredici anni in Eritrea* (Torino, 1898); PANTANO, G., *Ventitre anni di vita africana* (Firenze, 1932), de LAURIBAR, P., *Douze ans en Abyssinie* (Paris, 1898); WYLDE, A. B., *Modern Abyssinia* (London, 1901); id. *The Adua campaign and after* (London, 1900); GLFICHEN, Count A. E. W., *With the mission to Menelik* (London, 1898); PORTAL, G., *My mission to Abyssinia* (London, 1892); BENT, J. T., *The Sacred City of the Ethiopians* (London, 1898); HARRISON-SMITH, F., *Through Abyssinia* (London, 1890); MELLI, B., *La Colonia Eritrea dalle sue origini al anno 1901* (Parma, 1901).

(f) For the period 1830 to 1885:

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(2) The Napier Expedition: SHEPHERD, A. F., *The Campaign in Abyssinia* (Bombay, 1868); RASSAM, H., *British Mission to Theodore, 1865/66* (London, 1869); HOZIER, H. M., *The British Expedition to Abyssinia* (London, 1869); HOLLAND, T. J., and HOZIER, H. M., *Record of the Expedition to Abyssinia* (London, 1870); HENTY, G. A., *The March to Magdala* (London, 1868); BEKE, C. T., *The British captives in Abyssinia* (London, 1867); WILKINS, H. St. C., *Reconnoitring in Abyssinia* (London, 1870).

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(h) Period 1500 to 1750 In addition to works quoted in para. (d) above: ALVAREZ, F., ed. Lord Stanley of Alderley (London, 1881), also, in Hakluyt Soc. 1st Series, lxiv; CASTANHOSO, M. de, in Hakluyt, 2nd Series, x; BERMUDEZ, J., with Castanhoso; ALMEIDA, M. d', Fr. ed. *Histoire de ce qui s'est passé au Royaume d'Éthiopie es années 1624, 1625 et 1626* (Paris, 1629), also includes PAEZ, G.; TELLEZ, B., *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia* (London, 1707-10); LOBO, J., in Pinkerton, vol. 15, also tr. by Dr S. Johnson, 1735.

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(i) Period prior to 1500: general and derived works only have been used.

# INDEX

- Abarra, 119  
 Abbadié, A T d', 88, 180.  
 Abbai, 47  
 Abbas, Wazir, 48  
 'Abbasids, 33.  
 Abdullahi, *see* Khalifa  
 Abieto, title, 58.  
 Abrahā, Dejjaeh, 161.  
 Abrehé, Bait, 156.  
 'Abyssinian districts', 136, 157, 174.  
 Ad Aha, tribe, 155.  
 Ad Al Allam, tribe, 177  
 Ad Al Bakht, tribe, 177.  
 Ad 'Ali, tribe, 177  
 Ad 'Askar, tribe, 155  
 Ad-Drega, village, 57  
 Ad Gihadān, tribe, 177.  
 Ad Gultana, tribe, 177  
 Ad Hassari, tribe, 177.  
 Ad Humbirra, tribe, 177.  
 Ad Ibrahim, tribe, 177  
 Ad Mu'allim, tribe, 156.  
 Ad Nazi, tribe, 177  
 Ad Sala, tribe, 177  
 Ad Shaikh, tribe, 86, 176, 156  
 Ad Shaikh Garabat, tribe, 177.  
 Ad Sharaf, tribe, 177.  
 Ad Shuma, 155  
 Ad Taula, tribe, 177  
 Ad Teklés, tribe, 67, 156, 172.  
 Ad Teklesan, 146  
 Ad Temarian, tribe, 67, 156  
 Ad Tsaura, tribe, 156  
 Ad Tuwas, tribe, 177.  
 Ad 'Umr, tribe, 177  
 Ad Uqud, tribe, 177  
 Adal, 21  
 Adal, Ras, 99, 110, 116 f  
 Addis Abbeba, 126, 129 f., 134, 141, 145, 147  
 Addole, Wazir, 48.  
 Aden, 42, 95 f., 107, 112, 163  
 Adi Abo, 9.  
 Adi Caieh, 12, 120, 138, 161, 176.  
 Adi Nefas, 67, 120  
 Adi Quala, 108, 138, 161, 176  
 Adi Ugri, 42, 123, 126, 129, 138, 147, 161, 167, 176  
 Adi Yohannes, 120.  
 Adigrat, 126 f., 176.  
 Adomara, tribe, 60.  
 Adua, 3, 75, 80 f., 87 f., 97, 101, 101, 121 ff., 176  
 Adua, battle of, 128 ff., 169  
 Adulis, 12, 32, 37.  
 Afar, 37, 61.  
 Afara, tribe, 155.  
 Afenda, tribe, 155  
 Afra, 48  
 Africa, North, 85  
 Africa, South, 144, 152  
 Africans, West, 159.  
 Agamé, 9, 31, 51, 80, 82, 89, 102, 126  
 Agau, 14 f., 31, 33, 36, 40, 64.  
 Agazi, 31.  
 Ag'azian, 12.  
 Agordat, 124 f., 136 ff., 145, 157 ff., 164, 167, 176, 177  
 Ahmad 'Ali, Amir, 124  
 Ahmad bin Abdul Qadir al Shihab, 181.  
 Ahmad bin Ibrahim (Gran), 21, 46 ff., 59, 163  
 Ahmad Pasha abu 'Udan, 84, 106.  
 Ahmendrup Bey, 108  
 Aikota, 145, 157 f  
 Ailet, 106, 117, 156.  
 Akuba Mikael, 54.  
 Al Hamid 'Awwad, tribe, 177.  
 Ala Littoria, 137.  
 Albaritans, 49  
 Albertone, Gen., 128 f  
 Albuquerque, d', 41  
 Alexandria, 59, 77, 82  
 Algiers, 112.  
 'Ali Bey, 110  
 'Ali, Ras (of Beghemeder), 80.  
 'Ali, Ras (s/o Marié), 82, 88, 91  
 'Ali, Ras (nickname of Waldenkiel), 102.  
 Allomata, 176  
 Almada, 34  
 Alman, tribe, 177.  
 Almeida, M. d', 23, 181  
 Alula, Ras, 108 ff., 115.  
 Alvarez, F., 22, 44, 181  
 Amarat, tribe, 41.  
 Amba Alagi, 127, 147  
 Amba Cera, 115  
 Amba Gessem, 49  
 Amda Tsion, Negus, 21.  
 America(ns), 4, 139, 151 f., 161; *see also* U S.  
 Army  
 Amhara, 14 f., 19, 29, 31, 64, 68, 75, 81 ff., 141  
 Amharic, 16 f., 120.  
 Amidaib, 114  
 Amin, Shaikh al, 87  
 Amir bin Kunnu, 40  
 Anasa, 49  
 Anfila, 115.  
 Ankala, tribe, 155  
 Annesley, G., *see* Valentia, Lord.  
 Anseba, River, 5, 7  
 Antinori, O., 94, 113, 181.  
 Antonelli, Count, 113, 117 f., 120 ff  
 Aosta, Duke of, 134.  
 'Arabi Pasha, 114  
 Arafali, 105, 115, 120, 162, 172, 176.  
 Arasa Selassié, Ras, 117  
 Arakli Bey, 108.  
 Arimondi, Gen., 127 f.  
 Armenians, 104  
 Aroghé, 97.  
 Arresa, 145, 161  
 Asfaha, tribe, 34.  
 Asghedé, Bait, 67 f., 70, 86, 103, 136, 156.  
 Ashangi, Lake, 9  
 Asmara, 2, 5, 7, 34, 108, 112, 119, and *passim*.  
 Assab, 2, 7, 60, 112 f., 115, 119, 125, 138 f., 151, 162, 166, 172  
 Assabaka, tribe, 155  
 Assaimara, tribe, 60  
 Assal, Lake, 107  
 Assnorta, tribe, 162  
 Assyrians, 164

- Astuto dei Lucchesi, 133.  
 A'us, 156  
 Atbara, 117, 144  
 Ateshum, 57.  
 Aro Solomon, 81, 101  
 Aro Tuwoldemedin, 101.  
 Aussa, 60, 172  
 Awash, River, 47.  
 'Awwad, Bait, 177  
 Axum, 3, 9, 12-14, 28, 11, 63, 73, 75, 99, 126  
 Bab al Mandab, 112  
 Baccari, Gen, 145.  
 Badoglio, Marshal, 141  
 Badoli, 155.  
 Baghdad, 33.  
 Bahrmder, 9, 42  
 Bahr Negash, 42-5, 50 ff., 55, 62, 68, 70, 73, 76, 100  
 Baiu, Ras, 111  
 Bakafia, Negus, 77  
 Baker, V, 114  
 Bakhit, Cantibai, 119.  
 Baldissera, Gen, 117-30.  
 Bani Amir, 32, 38-40, 68 ff, 83, 85, 105, 115, 124, 135 f, 156, 164, 169 ff, 177.  
 Barai, Ras, 97  
 Baraki, Ras, 119, 161  
 Barattieri, Gen, 125 ff  
 Bardel, 95.  
 Barentu, 138, 145, 157 ff., 176.  
 Baria, 14, 36, 38, 42, 50, 64, 68 f, 83, 105 ff, 136, 157 ff, 169 ff  
 Barui, Ras, 109  
 Barka, River, 5, 7 f, 14, 32, 40, 50, 70 f, 84, 112, 166.  
 Barreto, N, 22  
 Barroni, 94  
 Basil, pseudo-Negus, 52  
 Baslé, 71.  
 Basset, R., 181  
 Bassopiano Occidentale, 136, 164.  
 Bassopiano Orientale, 136, 138  
 Batha Hagos, 119, 125.  
 Baza, 38  
 Bazbar, Abba, 98, *see also* John IV  
 Beccari, 94.  
 Beennet, 66.  
 Beghemeder, 47-9, 80, 96, 98 f  
 Béguinot, F., 180  
 Benjuk, 156, 172  
 Beillard, 93  
 Beilul, 45, 60, 113, 115, 154.  
 Beja, 12-14, 25, 28, 31, 33-41, 50, 68 ff., 84, 136 ff, 170 ff, 177  
 Beke, C 'T', 180  
 Belesa, River, 120, 130  
 Belgians, 89, 112  
 Bell, J. T., 89, 94.  
 Bellasuiwa, 155  
 Belu, 32, 34, 38, 40, 44, 70.  
 Benedetto, Father, 87  
 Bent, T, 180  
 Berber, 114.  
 Berbera, 107, 111 f  
 Berbers, 10.  
 Beresford-Pierce, Maj -Gen, 115.  
 Bermudez, 22, 48, 181  
 Bianchi, 113, 115  
 Bilein, 31, 36, 64 ff, 70, 85 f, 94, 102 f, 163, 170.  
 Bisharin, 41  
 Bisson, de, 94  
 Bitama, tribe, 158.  
 Bizen, 34, 41, 45  
 Blackshirts, 136-45  
 Blemmi, 12  
 Blondel, Count, 89  
 Blumhardt, Rev., 88  
 B O A C., 150  
 Bogos, 65, 76, 85, 94, 103 ff, 111, 169  
 Bonnetti, Admiral, 147  
 Bono, de, 140 f.  
 Borelli, 113  
 Borgnini, Senator, 124  
 Borrumeda, 123.  
 British Military Adm., 4, 146 to end  
 Bruce, James, 37, 78, 86 f, 95, 179, 181  
 Budge, Sir E. A. W., 179  
 Bumnet, *see* Beumnet  
 Buri, peninsula, 11, 51, 154.  
 Cabota, 34.  
 Cagnassi, E., 180.  
 Caumi, Admiral, 113  
 Cairo, 21, 42, 44, 85, 87 f, 108, 110, 117.  
 Cameron, Capt, 94 ff.  
 Cantibai, title, 57, 102  
 Capomazza, I, 179  
 Cappuchins, 23  
 Carabinieri, 137  
 Carnero, 22  
 Carneshim, 66, 100, 119.  
 Castanhoso, M de, 181  
 Caucasians, 10  
 Cecchi, A, 113, 181  
 Cerrina-Ferroni, 133.  
 Chiarini, 113  
 Chikka (title), 100, 135.  
 Choho, 37  
 Claudius, Dejach, 71.  
 Claudius, Negus, 22, 23, 49  
 Coattit, 126  
 Coffin, 81, 87 f, 181.  
 Cohaitu, 12, 32.  
 Combes, E., 88, 181.  
 Consociazione Turistica Italiana, 179  
 Conti Rossini, C, 179  
 Conzelman, W E, 180.  
 Cornacchia, Capt, 119.  
 Coulbeaux, J B., 179  
 Covilham, de, 41.  
 Crispi, F., 118 ff, 125, 180.  
 Cumming, D C, 180  
 Cypriots, 144  
 Cyrenaica, 134, 145, 149  
 Dabormida, Gen, 129  
 Daga, 177.  
 Dahumala, 155.  
 Dahlak Is, 11, 33, 136, 167, 176.  
 Dahiragot, 54  
 Dallol, 155, 167  
 Damas, 156  
 Damohasta, 155  
 Dankali, Danakil, 7 f, 14, 28, 34, 37 f., 43, 45, 50, 64, 89, 103, 106, 111, 113, 134 ff, 142, 154 f, 164, 167, 169 ff, 176.  
 Daodiace, 133  
 Daraka Is, 154  
 Debarua, 33, 41, 42, 45, 49-54, 63, 73, 76, 104, 138.  
 Debbab, 119 f, 122.

- Debra Dammo, 51.  
 Debra Tabor, 83, 94, 111.  
 Debrumela, 162.  
 Decameró, 138, 161, 176.  
 Dekkt Teshum, 100.  
 Dejach, title, 57 f, 75, 102.  
 Delia, Lake, 5.  
 Delmonte, father, 102.  
 Dembea, 29, 92, 94.  
 Dembesan, 100, 119.  
 Deroghté, 91.  
 Dervish(es), 4, 115 ff, 121, 124, 129 f.  
 Dessé Is., 93.  
 Dassié, 138.  
 Dugal, 70, 85, 124, 135, 157, 177.  
 Dillon, 88.  
 Dimfarikh Is., 154.  
 Doba, tribe, 37, 52, 77.  
 Dogali, 116.  
 Dogono, 32.  
 Dohol Is., 154.  
 Dologorodoc, Fort, 146.  
 Dori, 45.  
 Dori (bro of Marié), 82.  
 Douin, M., 180.  
 Dufton, Mr., 97, 180.  
 Dukumbia, 159.  
 Duncanson, J. D., v.  
 Dunna, tribe, 155.  
 Edd, 60, 89, 115, 154.  
 Egypt(ians), 1, 4, 10, 25, 41-2, 83 ff., 101, 105-9, 113, 124, 169.  
 Elias Bey, 185.  
 Ellena, Gen., 129.  
 Embatcalla, 138, 147.  
 Emberemi, 155.  
 Ennaha, 58.  
*Enciclopedia Italiana*, 179.  
 English Institute, 151.  
 Enticcio, 121.  
 Falasha, 14, 68.  
 Fara, Capt. di, 124.  
 Fares, Ras, 77.  
 Fascism, fascists, 4, 132, and *passim*.  
 Fasil, Negus, 23, 45, 74, 87.  
 Fatha Negast, 59, 102.  
 Fereseegna (title), 100.  
 Fernandez, 22.  
 Ferrari, 115.  
 Ferrat, P. V. A., 88, 181.  
 Fesa Kesos, 71.  
 Filepos, 34.  
 Flad, J. M., 97, 181.  
 Forest Militia, 139, 150.  
 France, French, 4, 84, 87 ff, 91, 93, 102 ff, 113, 162.  
 Franciscans, 20, 87 f.  
 Fremona, 22, 127.  
 French, Free, 144-6.  
 French Somaliland, 60, 112, 154.  
 Frusci, Gen., 143, 147.  
 Fung, 25, 40, 69, 78, 84, 169.  
 Gadimto, tribe, 155.  
 Gaffat, 94.  
 Gaibi, A., 180.  
 Gadiani, Husam, 158.  
 Gama, 50 f.  
 Galtner, J. G., 88, 180.  
 Galla(s), 21, 24, 52 f, 55, 59, 64, 77 ff, 92, 98, 142.  
 Galla A'abo, 99.  
 Gallabat, 111, 115, 117, 144 f.  
 Galla-Sidama, 141.  
 Galliano, Maj., 127.  
 Gama, di, Christoforo, 49.  
 Gama, di, Stefano, 49.  
 Gandolfi, Gen., 123.  
 Gash, River, 5, 8, 40, 41, 48, 50, 84, 105, 115, 133, 139, 159, 164.  
 Gashunashum, 29.  
 Gasparini, Dr., 133.  
 Gazelle Force, 145.  
 Gebracristos (s/o Habsullus), 58.  
 Gebracristos (predecessor of Ato), 101.  
 Gebra Maskal, 80.  
 Gebra Rafael, 82.  
 Gedarf, 114.  
 Gedra Sitta, tribe, 155.  
 Ge'ez, 12, 16 f., 59, 170.  
 Géné, Gen., 115 f.  
 Georgians, 64.  
 Germans, 88 f., 94, 106, 113, 131.  
 Ghilwet, Cantibai, 119.  
 Ghinda, 37, 107, 116 f., 129, 137 f., 151, 156, 172, 176.  
 Gibbon, E., 12.  
 Giolitti, 125.  
 Gioletti, 113.  
 Gleichen, E., 180.  
 Goa, 22.  
 Gobat, Rev. S., 88, 181.  
 Gobazié, Ras, 97 f., 101.  
 Godofelassi, 134.  
 Gojjam, 19, 47 f., 74 f., 79, 83, 99, 110, 121.  
 Gondar, 23, 25, 38, 46, 58 f., 72, 74, 77 ff, 82 f., 84, 87, 89, 91, 117, 138.  
 Gordon, Gen. C. J., 110 f., 114 f.  
 Gran, *see* Ahmad bin Ibrahim.  
 Granville, Lord, 113.  
 Greece, Greeks, 12, 13, 17, 41, 42, 104.  
 Greeks (in Asmara), 163.  
 Grenier, Father, 87.  
 Guangul, 92.  
 Guedit, 15.  
 Gugsa, Ras (of Amhara), 80 f.  
 Gugsa s/o Hailu, 119.  
 Gudi, 1, 180.  
 Gullui, 157.  
 Gumhod, 156.  
 Gundet, 108.  
 Gura, 108 f., 120.  
 Gura Airport, 2, 141, 151.  
 Habab, tribe, 67 f., 115 f., 156, 164.  
 Habsh(at), 11.  
 Habsullus, 57 f.  
 Hadarim, tribe, 155.  
 Hadendowa, tribe, 41, 157.  
 Hadgembosa, 119.  
 Hadhramaut, 64, 155, 162.  
 Hagos, *see* Batha Hagos.  
 Hagos Tafari, 126.  
 Haile Selassie I., 131, 147.  
 Hailu (of Hamarsien), 82, 101, 119.  
 Hailu (father of Theodore), 91.  
 Hailu Malakot, of Shon, 91.  
 Hailu, 45, 104, 120 f.  
 Hamutes, 10-17.  
 Hanafi, sect, 163.  
 Harat Is., 154.

- Iarikko, 32, 36, 43 ff., 49, 62 ff., 77, 86, 97, 115, 155  
 Harrar, 21, 46, 53, 60, 107, 111.  
 Hasan, Bait, 62.  
 Hasan Pasha, 108  
 Hashish, tribe, 177.  
 Hassal, tribe, 177  
 Hawakil Is., 115  
 Hawakil, tribe, 155  
 Hazamo, plain, 161  
 Hazu, tribe, 162.  
 Hazzege, 57, 101  
 Heath, Maj.-Gen., 144.  
 Helena, Queen, 22.  
 Henty, G. A., 180  
 Heuglin, T. von, 94, 181  
 Hewitt, Sir W., 114 f  
 Heyling, P., 23.  
 Hicks Pasha, 114  
 Hyaz, 36, 61, 85, 86, 162.  
 Hyjar, tribe, 159  
 Hindus, 163  
 Holland, T. J., 180  
 Hozier, H. M., 180.  
  
 Iddifer, tribe, 156  
 Ifat, 21.  
 Ilt, tribe, 158.  
 India(ns), 4, 96, 104, 162.  
 Indian divisions, 144-7  
 Information, Min of, 151.  
 Irob, 102, 162  
 Isaak (Bahr Negash), 51  
 Isenberg, C. W., 88, 181  
 Isma'il Pasha (murdered), 84  
 Isma'il Pasha (Khedive), 105 ff  
 Issel, Dr., 94, 181  
 Italy, Italians, 1, 4, 42, 109, 112, and *passim*  
 'Izzat Bey, 113, 115  
  
 Ja'alun, tribe, 84  
 Jacobis, de, 89 f, 91, 94, 102  
 Jangeren, tribe, 156  
 Janissaries, 64.  
 Japan, 139.  
 Jedda, 42, 50, 63, 86  
 Jerusalem, 15, 41.  
 Jesuits, 22-3, 87  
 Jews, 13, 14, 88, 109, 164.  
 Jews (Aden), 163  
 Jiberti, 33, 71, 163  
 John III, Negus, 92  
 John IV, Negus, 97 ff, 101, 104 ff, 113-19  
 John Baptist, of Imola, 41  
 John of Calabria, 41  
 Johnson, Dr. S., 181  
 Joseph, Dom, 87  
 Justus, Negus, 77.  
  
 Kafel, 119  
 Kafta, 9  
 Karmfu, Ras, 84  
 Karora, 7, 36, 146 f  
 Kassa, of Agame, 82  
 Kassa s/o Hailu, *see* Theodore.  
 Kassa, of Tembien, *see* John, Negus.  
 Kassa (s/o Sabagadia), 92  
 Kassa Golja, 101  
 Kassala, 3, 71, 84 ff, 95, 104 f, 114 f., 124, 129 f., 135, 143-6, 159.  
 Kefla Yasu, 80.  
 Kelu, 34  
  
 Kennedy-Cooke, Brig B., 149.  
 Keien, 7-8, 28, 35, 40, 42, 61, 64 ff., 89-94, 101 ff., 106 ff, 110 f., 114, 119 ff 123, and *passim*.  
 Keru, 145  
 Khalifa, the, 115, 117 f  
 Khartum, 111, 114 f, 144, 159.  
 Khasrau Pasha, 85  
 Khurshid Pasha, 84  
 Kidanemariam, Ras, 161.  
 Kinzelbach, Dr., 94.  
 Kirkham, Sgt, 99, 107  
 Knapp, J. L., 88, 103, 181  
 Kokebié, 86, 91.  
 Koraj, title, 100 f, 111  
 Kubari Is., 154.  
 Kubkub, 36, 146  
 Kuft, 85, 105  
 Kunama, 9, 14, 38, 42, 68 f, 83, 93 f. 104 ff, 136, 141, 157 ff, 169 ff  
 Kush, 11  
  
 Labat, tribe, 177  
 Lakatakurra, tribe, 159  
 Lamalmon, Mt., 51  
 Lasta, 15, 75, 79, 81 f, 97 f  
 Lauribar, P. de, 180  
 Layard, 95  
 Lazzarists, 89, 103  
 Lebka, River, 119  
 Lebna Dengel, 23, 47, 51.  
 Lee, B. W., v  
 Lefébure, 88  
 Le Jean, G., 94 f, 181  
 Lenoir du Roule, 87.  
 Leone, Father, 90, 112  
 Lessona, P., 179  
 Libya, 134, 136.  
 Licata, G. B., 179  
 Lisbon, 22.  
 Littman, E., 180  
 Lobo, J., 22, 181.  
 Longrigg, Brig S. H., 149.  
 Lorenzini, Gen., 145 f  
 Loring, Col., 108  
 Lutherans, 23.  
  
 Magdala, 92-8  
 Mahd(sts), 109, 113 ff  
 Mai Gabata, 128  
 Maillet, de, 87  
 Mayo, di, 119 f, 121  
 Makallé, 121 ff, 125, 127, 176  
 Makonnen, Lu., 101  
 Makonnen, Ras, 120, 127, 131  
 Mala, Bait, 156  
 Malak Sagad, 23, 52, 68  
 Malawiya, 159  
 Maliki, sect, 163.  
 Mamluks, 44  
 Mangasha, Ras, 118-30  
 Marda, tribe, 159  
 Marea, 61, 65 f, 86, 102, 156, 163, 172 f  
 Mareu, 65 f.  
 Mareb Mellash, 9, 24, 52, 58, 74, 80, 92, 94, 171.  
 Mareb, River, 5, 9, 24, 54, 102, 108, 110, 120, 130, 142  
 Marié, 81 f  
 Marinoni, Bishop, 153  
 Martini, F., 113, 124, 133 f.  
 Martino, di, 133.

- Masheha, 97 f.  
 Massau, Bishop G, 89, 181.  
 Massawa, 2, 3, 7, and *passim*  
 Matamma, 84, 95  
 Matteucci, 113  
 Mauro, Fra, 41.  
 Mazaga, 50 f  
 McCarthy, Brig. C H F D'A., 149.  
 McCoan, J. C., 180.  
 Mecca, 20, 64  
 Medcr, 115  
 Melli, B., 180.  
 Menab, 29  
 Mendez, 23, 45  
 Menelik I., 16, 28, 29  
 Menelik II., 15, 92, 98 f., 107, 109 f., 113, 117, and *passim*  
 Minsa, 61, 65 f., 86, 102 f., 156, 172 f  
 Mensai, 65  
 Merewether, Col., 96.  
 Merid, 101  
 Meroni, 29, 55 f  
 Mersa Fatma, 154.  
 Mersa Kuba, 155.  
 Meshalit, 149, 146  
 Meshalit, tribe, 155  
 Meslenié, 135, 157, 160.  
 Messervey, Col., 145.  
 Mikael Suhul, Ras, 77 ff., 81, 83, 97.  
 Mina, 22, 51 f  
 Miniferi, tribe, 162  
 Mirghani, family, 85, 105, 158  
 Mogreb, 159  
 Mombasa, 64  
 Mondon-Vichalhet, C, 180  
 Monkuilo, 62, 104, 113, 155.  
 Montuori, Father, 89  
 Moré, L. J., 179.  
 Morley, J. A. E., v.  
 Mostul, 95  
 Muhammad Ahmad (Mahdi), 114  
 Muhammad 'Ali Pasha, 87 f  
 Muhammad al Stambuli, 84.  
 Mulikutto, 96  
 Muna, River, 130  
 Münzinger, W., 94, 96, 101, 106-8, 123, 135, 181.  
 Murad, 63.  
 Musa bin 'Umr, 63  
 Mussolini, 134, 136  
  
 Nabara, tribe, 156.  
 Nabtab, 70, 157  
 Nadel, S. F., v  
 Nagfa, 7, 32, 36, 103, 156 f., 176.  
 Naib, 44, 49 f., 62 ff., 68, 76 f., 81, 86, 93, 103, 110, 115 f., 135, 155.  
 Naod, Negus, 77.  
 Naod Moghessa, 45  
 Napier, Sir C., 1, 96-8, 101, 105, 109, 162  
 Naples, 124.  
 Napoleon III., 95, 101  
 Nasir Pasha, 162  
 Nassal, tribe, 155.  
 Nebet, 70.  
 Nefasit, 138, 147.  
 Negusi, 90-3, 112, 115.  
 Nerazzini, Dr., 115 f., 129, 181.  
 Nesbitt, M., 179.  
 Nile, River, 1, 2, 10, 38, 41, 69, 84, 87.  
 Nimeveh, 95  
  
 Nokra Is., 154.  
 Nora Is., 154  
 Nubar Pasha, 108.  
 Nubia, 84  
  
 Obeid, el, 114.  
 Odorizzi Dante, 179  
 Omdurman, 130  
 Ophir, 37  
 Orcro, Gen., 121 f  
 Osman Digna, 115  
 Otumlo, 62, 113, 155  
 Oviedo, 22, 45, 50, 52  
  
 Pacsi Galla, 176  
 Pacz, G., 181  
 Pacz, P., 22, 45.  
 Palmerston, Lord, 89  
 Pantano, G., 180.  
 Paris, 89, 93, 95, 101, 115  
 Parkyns, M., 180  
 Parsons, Col., 130  
 Partoli, A., 41.  
 Parlet, 87  
 Pearce, N., 80 f., 88, 181  
 Perini Is., 112  
 Perrini Ruffillo, 179.  
 Perruchon, J., 180  
 Persian Gulf, 44.  
 Petri, 88.  
 Piano, Col., 126  
 Pitt, W., 87  
 Platt, Gen. Sir W., 144-6  
 Plowden, W. C., 85, 89, 91, 94 f., 181.  
 Poles, 94.  
 Polizia Africana Italiana (P.A.I.), 137, 148.  
 Pollera, A., 179  
 Poncet, C. J., 87, 181.  
 Pope, the, 20, 22, 41.  
 Port Sudan, 138, 144  
 Portal, G., 117, 180  
 Portuguese, 4, 21-3, 41, 44-9.  
 Powell, Mr., 95  
 Pozzolini, 116.  
 Presbyterians, 161  
 Prester John, 22, 41.  
 Prideaux, Capt., 97  
 Pristiani, Maj., 129  
 Protestants, 88 ff., 177.  
 Ptolemies, 12.  
 Punt, 11.  
  
 Raffray, A., 113, 181  
 Rahaita, 112, 154  
 Rashaida, tribe, 103, 156.  
 Rassam, H., 95 f., 180  
 Ratib Pasha, 108.  
 Rauf Pasha, 107  
 Rava, M., 179  
 Red Cross, Italian, 153  
 Red Sea Islands, 154, 166, 176, *see* Dahlak  
 René, M., 104.  
 Robel, Ras, 77.  
 Roden, K. G., 179  
 Rohlf, G., 113, 181.  
 Rom, 32  
 Rome, 22, 41, 87, 93, 122 ff., 125, 127, 143, 147  
 Ropeway, 140, 150  
 Rora Bagla, 67.  
 Rubatino Coy., 112f.

- Ruppel, W P E. S, 88, 181  
 Russel, Count S, 93, 115, 180
- Saad-Dzega, 57  
 Sa'an, 116 f, 119, 123, 137  
 Sabaeans, 11, 14, 16  
 Sabagadis, 81 f, 88, 91, 99, 121  
 Sabderat, 84, 125, 129, 145, 157 f  
 Sabelli, L. de, 179  
 Sable Wangel, 49  
 Saganetti, 102, 119 ff, 123, 125, 129, 138, 161, 176  
 Sagara, Fra, 41  
 Sahil, 9, 36, 61 f, 64 f, 103, 105, 155 ff, 170 ff  
 Saho, 34, 37, 52, 61, 65, 97, 103, 115, 135 f, 155, 161 ff, 174  
 Sa'id Pasha, 84, 105  
 Sal'uma, abuna, 82 f, 89, 91  
 Saletta, Col, 113, 116  
 Salsa, Maj, 128  
 Salt, H, 87 f, 95, 181  
 Salvaggio-Raggi, 133  
 Sambar, 9, 11, 32, 36 f, 41 f, 61 f, 103, 136, 154 f, 162, 169 ff  
 San Maizano, Gen., 116  
 Sandford, Col, 144  
 Sapeto, G, 89, 93, 102, 112, 181  
 Sardinia, 90  
 Saxe-Coburg, Duke of, 94.  
 Schimper, Herr, 88  
 Sebbatu (of Agamé), 121 f  
 Sebbatu (of Carnesium), 119  
 Selim I, 44  
 Sermen, 68, 92  
 Semites, 10-17, and *passim*  
 Senafe, 37, 96 f, 126, 138, 161 f, 176  
 Senheit, 9, 106 f, 114  
 Sennar, 40, 69, 84, 87.  
 Senussi, sect, 85  
 Setit, River, 5, 8 f, 57, 68, 84, 101, 106, 133, 158  
 Seyum (general of Menelik), 121  
 Shafa'i, sect, 163  
 Shaglat, 145  
 Shaikh ul Mushayikh, 158.  
 Shakir, Bait, 156  
 Shanayib, 177  
 Shankalla, 38  
 Sheba, Queen of, 16, 19, 28  
 Shepherd, A F, 180.  
 Shihio, 37  
 Shikelti, 122  
 Shiré, 9, 11, 38, 54, 69, 71, 93, 101, 158 f  
 Shoa, 15 f, 19, 74, 79, 81, 83, 92, 107, 113, 117, and *passim*  
 Shoho, 37  
 Shukri, M F, 180  
 Shukriya, tribe, 158  
 Shumagallé, mine, 167.  
 Sulani, T., 179  
 Silva, de, 22, 45  
 Simon, G, 180  
 Sinai, 42, 93  
 Singal, 125 f  
 Sinkat, 41, 114  
 Sinkat Kainab, tribe, 177  
 Smith, Harrison, F, 116, 180  
 Sopodas, tribe, 159  
 Soleillet, 113  
 Solomonides, 13, 15-16, 19, 24, 59, 74  
 Somalia, 141, 149  
 Somalis, 14, 21, 17, 46, 59, 64, 154 f  
 Sostan, de, 113  
 Spaniards, 22, 23, 113  
 Steckr., 113  
 Stefanini, G, 179  
 Stella, Father, 85, 91, 102, 112  
 Stein, Rev, 95  
 Steudner, Dr., 94  
 Stevami, Col, 139  
 Suakin, 40-2, 41-5, 50 f, 63 f, 86, 105, 114  
 Sudan Defence Force, 143-7  
 Suez, 93, 112  
 Susen., 167  
 Susenyos, Negus, 23, 57, 74  
 Suzara, A, 180.  
 Swedish Mission, 95, 103 f, 159, 161  
 Swiss, 88, 91  
 Syria, 13  
 Tafara, Ras, 131, *see also* Haile Selassie.  
 Tajura, 107  
 Taka, 9, 71, 84 f, 104, 124  
 Takazze, 5, 9, 41, 50, 74, 81, 91, 93.  
 Takla Giorgis, 98, *see also* Giobazie  
 Takla Imanot, 116  
 Tamisier, M., 88, 181  
 Tarké, Bait, 65, 156  
 Taukwé, Bait, 65, 156  
 Taulud Is, 36.  
 Tazkaro, 51  
 Tellez, B, 181  
 Tembien, 31, 77, 82, 97, 176.  
 Teroa, tribe, 162  
 Teroa Bait Mushé, tribe, 156  
 Tesemma, Ras, 161  
 Tesfa Lchul, 47-8  
 Tesfazian, 57  
 Tessenei, 138, 144 f, 157 f, 176  
 Tessitore, Gen, 144, 147.  
 Theodore (Bahr Negash), 45, 47-8.  
 Theodore, Negus, 74, 79, 91-8, 100  
 Theophilus, Negus, 77  
 Thio, 60, 89, 154.  
 Tigrat, 17  
 Tigrat Makonnen, 42, 54, 73, 75  
 Tigre, 16, 17, 40, 61, 94, 151 ff, 177  
 Tigrinya, 16 f, 141, 151, 160 ff, 163  
 Tilka, tribe, 159  
 To Badawi, 40, 69, 158  
 Tokar, 156.  
 Toselli, Maj, 121, 125, 127  
 Touvier, Mons, 102  
 Travers, Dr, 123, 126  
 Trevasakis, K, v  
 Trevisani, R, 179  
 Tsana, Lake, 14  
 Tsellari, River, 9  
 Tuaregs, 10  
 Tunis, 112  
 Turkey, Turks, 1-3, 21, 23, 24, 32, 44, 50 ff, 64, 71, 86, 103, 105, 113, 169.  
 Ubié, 81 ff, 88, 91 f  
 Uccallit, treaty of, 120 ff, 126 f  
 Ugara, 167.  
 Umberto, King, 122 f.  
 Umm Hajar, 157 f, 176.  
 U.S. Army, 159 f  
 'Uthman, Bait, tribe, 62  
 'Uthman bin Hidad, 156.  
 'Uthman Digna, *see* Osman



Valentia, Lord, 87, 181  
 Valles, Gen, 129  
 Victor, Prince, 49  
 Victoria, Queen, 95, 107.  
 Vigoni, P, 113

Wa, 116.  
 Wachai, 145  
 Wag, 97.  
 Wakhiro, 155  
 Walatta Giorgis, 77  
 Walda Ezum, 53  
 Walda Mikael (s/o Sabagadis), 82  
 Walda Mikael (of Avergille), 92  
 Walda Selassie, R 17, 80 L, 87  
 Walda Shum, 80 f  
 Waldenrael, R 11, 101 ff, 122.  
 Walker, Mi, 94  
 Waria, tribe, 156  
 Wavell, Gen, 146  
 Weld-Blundell, H, 180.  
 Werne, P., 180  
 Wilkins, H St C, 180  
 Wingate, Maj, 111  
 Winstanley, Mr., 110, 180  
 Woggero, 150  
 Wolff, Rev, 88  
 Wolkat, 9, 57, 141 f.  
 Wollega, 14.  
 Wollo, 47

Wolsley, Sir G, 114  
 Wylde, A B, 180  
 Yaqubi, 14  
 Yasu I (Great), 24, 63, 69, 74, 87  
 Yasu II, 77  
 Yasu, Li, 131.  
 Yekuno Amlak, 21  
 Yeyi, 98.  
 Yemem, 11, 13, 15, 33, 36 f., 60, 64, 103,  
 155 f., 162, 165 f  
 Yoes I, Negus, 78  
 Yohannes Akw, 45.  
 Yuzdemir Pasha, 51 f  
 Za Dengel, 23  
 Zaga, 155  
 Zaque, 15  
 Zaid, Gt, 65  
 Zandagie, 66  
 Zanzibar, 64  
 Zara Yakub, 21, 33  
 Zara Yohannes, 51  
 Zaru, 93.  
 Zauditu, Empress, 111  
 Zazzeva, 57 f, 76, 78, 81, 100 f, 104, 112,  
 119, 138  
 Zeila, 42, 50, 107, 111 f, 113, 130.  
 Zoli, 133, 179  
 Zula, 12, 36, 87, 93, 96, 111, 115, 162.



